

**‘we can love nothing, but that
which we do, or think we do
understand’: the Sacred and the
Profane in Donne’s Poetry.**

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Abstract

Donne's dismissal of a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane in his *Elegies*, *Songs and Sonets*, and *Divine Poems* is fundamental to his conception of love. Throughout his poetry, and reiterated time and again in his *Sermons*, is his conviction that however desirable such a distinction may be between earthly and divine love, it is at best arbitrary, and often proves futile. This is because the nature of our love and its expression, whether for men and women, or God, defies categorisation as discrete secular or sacred manifestations. Donne's approach to this paradox is best demonstrated by considering his secular and religious poetry together, which however obvious it may seem, has not previously been undertaken in any great detail. As a way of contextualising what Donne is doing, and emphasising his essential orthodoxy, two complementary literary traditions are discussed. The first, in Chapter Two, is the exegetical tradition surrounding The Song of Songs, in conjunction with two mystics, St. Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross, and the poets, Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw. Petrarchism is the second, secular, literary tradition looked at, in Chapter Three. I then turn to the poetry itself, devoting the rest of Chapter Three to the *Elegies*, Chapter Four to the *Songs and Sonets*, and Chapter Five to the *Divine Poems*. By examining the individual groups of poems together like this I want to demonstrate that in the profane poetry there is a discernable connection between the sanctification and celebration of earthly love and Donne's use of religious terminology, which is mirrored in the secular, often sexual imagery found in his description of his love for God. The result is that however startling and occasionally uncomfortable readers may believe Donne's juxtaposition of the earthly and the divine to be, his conflation of these two apparent opposites is fully considered.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Frederica said there were two kinds of metaphor. Comparisons between sensuous things – Wordsworth’s marvellous sea-beast and his stone in the sun. And the kind that compares a human abstraction to a sensuous experience: affliction to a blunted knife, love to compasses, desire to a crumb of dust stretched from heaven to hell. The seventeenth century had problems with the second kind because the sensual world was the fallen world, and yet you must make metaphors of sweetness or brightness to describe virtue and heaven, however corruptly.

(A. S. Byatt *Still Life*, 346)

John Donne conflates and juxtaposes the profane and the divine throughout his secular and religious poetry in a way that is fundamental to his conception of love. It is neither accident nor coincidence that the *Elegies*, *Songs and Sonets* and *Divine Poems* share common imagery and metaphors, for in writing of his experience of love, whether for another person or for God, Donne does not distinguish between earthly, sensual love and divine love: there is no dichotomy separating them. That this is so many critics have noted. Raman Selden writes, for example ‘Almost all of Donne’s best poems are concerned explicitly or implicitly with the intersections of spiritual and carnal terms’ (59), while R. V. Young comments that ‘our most transcendent aspirations are as limitless and insatiable as our most sulphurous desires. . . . What is more, our divergent longings often seem not merely simultaneous, but even indistinguishable’ (252). Just as pertinent is Frank Warnke’s ‘With striking consistency, the imagery of the love poems is religious – as that of the religious poems (most of them later in date) is erotic. The poet seems compelled to find in amorous experience the transcendent constancy of the religious and, in religious experience, the immediate intensity of the erotic’ (5). Lindsay Mann similarly makes the point that ‘Donne’s portrayals of human and divine love do not support the general perception of a dualism of early profanity and later asceticism in his works’; there is rather ‘continuity

and relation between human and divine' (1985-86 548) in Donne's poetry. More generally, two critics independently reinforce the essential indistinguishableness of the sacred and the profane. Anthony Low notes that for writers of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries 'there were important connections, as well as differences; indeed, it is hard to see how these two loves could fail to intersect in some way' (1), while Constantinos Patrides asks, 'But are not lovers wont to describe their experiences in language borrowed from theology? And have not some of the most moving expressions of divine love been set forth in explicitly secular terms?' (xlvii).

Despite these statements, however, the commonplace that Donne juxtaposes the secular and the sacred often constitutes a throwaway, not warranting further discussion, presumably because self-evident. Patrides, for instance, observes that Donne's 'secular poems frequently partake of the sacred dimension, and indeed vice-versa' (xlvii), but he does not elaborate on how such a statement might be applicable to specific poems. As with a great majority of critics he appears indifferent to how and why the secular and the sacred intermingle, and how this affects our understanding of Donne's treatment of love in his poetry. The concomitant dearth¹ of any detailed analysis of Donne's use of sacred and profane imagery in both his secular and religious poetry should not, however, be accepted as proof that there is no call for such a study. The absence of a dichotomy between secular and sacred love for Donne is in fact, I believe, of fundamental significance in his depiction of love. His use of sacred imagery in his secular poetry and secular imagery in his divine poetry is sustained by his belief that his love for a

¹ Individual sequences of poems, the *Elegies*, the *Songs and Sonets* etc., have always lent themselves to commentary and analysis; however, Lindsay Mann's article, 'Sacred and Profane Love in Donne.', Theresa DiPasquale's *Literature and Sacrament: the Sacred and the Secular in John Donne*, and Hans Osterwalder's article, "'Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me": the Love Imagery in John Donne's Secular and Religious Poems.' (in *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 1995, 20 (1), 199-210), are the only three studies that go some way towards connecting the poems in a similar, but more limited, manner to that which I undertake in this thesis. Unfortunately Osterwalder's article was found too late to include in my discussion; however, his focus on Donne's use of profane, sexual imagery in his religious poetry and his corresponding use of Neoplatonic ideas in his secular verse is both interesting and insightful.

woman shares the same essential qualities as his love for God. Not all of his poems are germane to a discussion of his use of secular and sacred imagery, but there are sufficient to justify an examination, with four or five of the often-flippant *Elegies*, nearly half of the *Songs and Sonets*, and at least half of the *Holy Sonnets* showing to some degree how Donne conflates the profane and sacred when writing of love.

Interestingly, while critics acknowledge that Donne does juxtapose the sacred and the profane, it has been his practice in the *Divine Poems* alone that has received critical attention.² Among the *Holy Sonnets* 'Batter my heart' and 'Show me deare Christ', with their overtly secular imagery, have been censured for descriptions of Christ's relationship with the Church too tinged with the sexual. Two factors in Donne's use of secular imagery in his religious poetry have been overlooked, however. First, Donne is undeniably reliant upon the tradition of allegorical exegesis of The Song of Songs as the basis for such imagery; this canonically-sanctioned practice of allegorical exegesis of one of the most (physically) sensuous biblical books is an important precedent for much of the secular imagery in Donne's religious poetry. Second, it is a curious irony that while critical hackles are raised by Donne's profane imagery in the *Divine Poems*, his sacred imagery in his profane poetry goes unremarked upon. However, it is only when the specific secular and sacred poems are looked at together that the discernable and crucial connections between the two are fully apparent.

Before this can be undertaken though, Donne's use of secular imagery in his sacred poetry must be placed in the context of the exegetical tradition surrounding that most sensual (and hence problematic) of the books of the Bible, The Song of Songs, as well as the writings of his contemporaries and near contemporaries St. Teresa of Ávila, St. John of the Cross, Robert

² Hans Osterwalder, in his article, "'Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me': the Love Imagery in John Donne's Secular and Religious Poems," seems to be the only critic who considers at all the place of the secular poetry in Donne's 'paradoxical reversal of the images for love' (200). Within the confines of Osterwalder's article the secular poems he discusses are 'The Exstasie', 'The Relique' (but briefly), 'To his Mistris Going to Bed', and 'The Canonization'.

Southwell and Richard Crashaw. This contextual introduction is the subject of Chapter Two. Dating from about the third-century AD, and reaching an apogee in the Middle Ages, the exegetical tradition that grew up around The Song sought to transform its decidedly erotic imagery into an allegorical interpretation acceptable to the Church. The mystics, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, and the poets, Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw were less directly reliant on the allegorical tradition surrounding The Song of Songs, but they also utilised the profane in their struggle to express the ineffable divinity of God.

Chapter Three begins with a brief discussion of Petrarchism and its various English practitioners. I consider specifically those poets, among them Wyatt and Sidney, whose use of religious imagery in their poetry, though not extensive and always essentially Petrarchan, is such that a noticeable juxtaposition of the earthly and the sacred, not unlike that found in Donne, takes place. Those few of Donne's *Elegies* germane to my thesis are then discussed. Donne's use of sacred imagery in them is restrained. His flippancy, wit and occasional cynicism or misanthropy are in stark contrast to the religious terminology that finds its way into the *Elegies*. Although Donne may eschew a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane here, as elsewhere in his poetry, his use of sacred imagery in the *Elegies* serves to reinforce, rather than contradict or soften, the profane reality of the love (or lack of love) being described in them.

Chapter Four is concerned with the *Songs and Sonets*. In contrast to the *Elegies*, in which Donne's flippant distrust of faithful mistresses is something of a preoccupation, the *Songs and Sonets* also contains poems that celebrate mutual fidelity and trust. Concomitantly, Donne's use of sacred imagery is greater, with some poems, for example 'The Canonization', 'The Exstasie', or 'The Flea', conflating the secular and profane in ways that go beyond being parodic or witty for their own sake. This is not to imply that Donne suddenly becomes absolutely serious in his exploration of love – far from it – but rather

that mixed with the wit there is an awareness that human love can be extraordinary and unique, with this wonder expressed in sacred terms.

The *Divine Poems*, the subject of Chapter Five, are the religious counterbalance to the two preceding chapters on Donne's secular love poetry. Just as Donne uses sacred imagery to describe his earthly love in his profane poems, so in the *Divine Poems* he turns the secular to sacred ends. The *Divine Poems* differ from the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonets* however, in that these poems, and particularly the *Holy Sonnets*, are infamous for their juxtaposition of the divine and the profane. The critical disconcertion at many of the *Holy Sonnets* seems to be caused by Donne's conflating the secular, and often sexual, with the divine in such a way as to leave no gap separating them; the fact of Donne's orthodoxy is often overlooked. In practice, his dismissal of any dichotomy between the secular and the sacred in the *Divine Poems* is completely consistent with his treatment of love in the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonets*.

Finally, in Chapter Six, some overall conclusions are suggested. The contents of each chapter is summarised, and the connections between each chapter illustrated. I finally restate my argument as I have developed it in this thesis.

Chapter 2: the Context of The Song of Songs

The description in The Song of Songs of the sacred in secular terms, and the Book's canonically-sanctioned place in the Bible have had a significant and pervasive influence on both its exegetes and others (whether mystics, poets or preachers), who have drawn on its rich language and imagery in their writing, including St. Teresa of Ávila, St. John of the Cross, Robert Southwell, and Richard Crashaw. The fact of its canonicity, when the book's 'literal meaning is so lushly erotic', and that the 'Song makes no direct mention of God' (Astell 1), results in a striking ambiguity of presentation that its exegetes over the centuries have attempted to resolve through allegorical interpretation.

Perhaps part of the uneasiness generated by this biblical book of love is due to the fundamental natures of both love and language, whereby 'there will always be commonplaces in love language, whether one is speaking of deities or of humans' (Freedman 151). This seemingly innocuous statement succinctly expresses a truth at the core of both The Song of Songs and, I will argue, Donne's sacred and secular love poetry: that no absolute dichotomy between the sacred and the secular can exist in the conception, expression and understanding of love, precisely because there are commonplaces in love language. Concepts and language cannot help but segue between the profane and divine.

The interpretative tradition surrounding The Song of Songs reflects this knowledge on the part of its exegetes, who direct their critical attention away from its 'literal carnality' (Astell 2). Although we would today regard human sexuality as 'God's good gift' to 'be enjoyed and celebrated' (Blackwell 602), The Song's exegetes believed rather that its exuberant, physically sensuous celebration in The Song was likely to endanger the carnally minded reader who had turned to the Canticle for divine inspiration

(Astell 1).³ I think, then, that The Song of Songs represents a specific example of the general fear (on the part of theologians at least), of Eros. The perceived danger lies in the fact that, while Eros can be strictly defined, at least in theory, as constituting 'a human love for the divine, a love of man for God' (Nygren viii), its definition can slide sideways, to encompass human, sexual love. What this can mean, as C. S. Lewis observes, is that in 'every wife, mother, child and friend . . . [there is] a possible rival to God' and thus the danger exists of loving them idolatrously (Lewis 119).

Origen, the voluminous third-century commentator on The Song of Songs, realises only too well this need to provide an appropriately sanctified interpretation for communities of lay and religious readers alike. He is aware that The Song literally expresses carnal, not spiritual love but reasons that 'If these words are not to be spiritually understood, are they not mere tales? If they contain no hidden mystery, are they not unworthy of God?' (Astell 2). Origen finds it untenable that a canonically accepted book should have no spiritual dimension to it, explicit or otherwise, and hence emphasises the spiritual, divine interpretation of The Song of Songs in a way which '[is] crucial for all subsequent Christian interpretation, both East and West' (Matter 25). It is not just the thoroughness of Origen's commentary that helps to establish its centrality for later interpretations, but that he supplies what prove to be definitive allegorical models for understanding the love described in The Song. At its least complicated, this love is that which is described in Proverbs 30:18-19:⁴ 'There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid'.

³ The *Glossa Ordinaria*, of ca.1128, warns against reading The Song of Songs literally 'lest acquaintance with it teach slippery minds so much that the composition causes them to yield to bodily lusts' (Astell 20). Donne similarly warns against ignorant perusal of The Song in one of his Sermons, saying, 'He that comes to read *Solomons* Love-song, and loves not him upon whom that Song is directed, will rather endanger, than profit himself by that reading' (*Sermons* 3.318).

⁴ All biblical quotes are from the 1611 King James Authorized Version.

Yet *The Song* literally celebrates exactly this kind of uncomplicated love between a man and a maid. It is this explicit physical sensuality that encourages Origen, and others after him, to circumscribe the book's interpretation within acceptable and clearly defined parameters of exposition. Accordingly, Origen's elucidation of a veiled spiritual meaning as the primary interpretation of *The Song of Songs* becomes the paradigm on which virtually all later exegesis rests. Origen succeeds, in effect, in his commentary on *The Song*, in practising this prayer of St. Francis: 'detach my mind, Lord, from all that is under heaven, by the fiery and sweet power of your love' (Smith 1985 90). What results is the exegetes' distancing of themselves and their commentaries from the overt physical sensuality of *The Song*, which, as stated in the introduction to Origen's commentary, is this:

This little book is an epithalamium, that is a nuptial song, which it seems to me that Solomon wrote in a dramatic form, and sang after the fashion of a bride to her bridegroom, who is the word of God, burning with celestial love. Indeed he loves her deeply, whether she is the soul, made in his own image, or the Church. (Matter 28)

This is the tradition of allegorising *The Song of Songs* at its simplest, without the later, medieval exegetic elaboration of the *Ecclesia* (the Bride as the Church), and the *Anima* (the Bride as the soul).

Although this allegorising of *The Song* may seem strange to modern Western readers, for whom sensuality and sexuality, and indeed the glorification of the (perfect) physical body are constantly foregrounded, the medieval allegorisation of *The Song* (deriving from Origen), is about more than just differing sensibilities. I say medieval allegory, because aside from the fact that the medieval Church was a far more earthly institution than the third-century Church, the Middle Ages was also the period in which the greatest number of commentaries⁵ on *The Song of Songs* were written.

⁵ According to E. Ann Matter (3), there are nearly one hundred extant commentaries and homilies, written between the sixth and fifteenth centuries, on *The Song of Songs*.

Despite a modern reader's impression that medieval exegetes of The Song can appear obsessive in their fear of having the physical intrude on the spiritual, E. Ann Matter suggests that they were perhaps captivated by the (to us) 'disconcerting fact that the passionate lovers of The Song of Songs are turned into Christ and the Church' for the very reason that '[t]he Church, as an earthly institution but also as a heavenly ideal, could so easily attain personification precisely because [the] ecclesiological commentaries model medieval reality' (109). Hence, while the medieval perception of the Church as a Bride of Christ 'may seem the coldest allegory of a hot poem' (109), the 'medieval reality' was that (to make sweeping generalisations), the vast majority of the literate population was composed of vowed celibate male religious, for whom the Church, and its safeguarding, and glorification, was their life; it was in their collective interest to ensure that heresy (and that could include deviant readings of The Song of Songs) was not allowed to flourish, either inside or outside the Church.

This pragmatic view of allegory, and of The Song of Songs in particular, deserves, however, to be balanced by the altogether more spiritual, unworldly approach exemplified by Gregory the Great (ca.540-604), the Venerable Bede (ca.673-735), Hugh of Saint-Victor (ca.1078-1141) and Alain de Lille (ca.1128-1202), who focus on the *Ecclesia* and *Anima* exegetical traditions. Gregory's emphasis, though expressed in generalities, is on the practice of allegory as 'the hint of the former bliss of paradise in this pilgrimage of life; it is a machine which draws human senses up to God; it is the means by which we are stirred to spiritual love through such fleshly images as kisses and breasts' (Matter 94). In and of themselves kisses and breasts are not necessarily sinful, nor only denotative of lust; rather, they are physical means to aid divine meditation and exposition.

Bede's reading of The Song of Songs is important not only because it continues Gregory's perception but because it intersects with visual representations of divine/human love. In common with Gregory, Bede's view of The Song is as a 'joyous celebration of God's pure love for both the

Church and the soul' (Matter 99), with an important emphasis on its relevancy to the monastic life. The result is that in his commentary he 'continually balances the outward action of the Church with monastic virtues' (Matter 101). Bede's vocation as a monk thus does not preclude him from recognising The Song's applicability to the world outside the cloister; and monasticism and the world are brought into even closer proximity in a manuscript of Bede's commentary, probably created in St Albans in the twelfth-century, which portrays, in male and female form, Christ and the Church locked in a kiss. The illumination is part of the illustrated capital 'O' of 'osculetur', in which the letter is shaped as a mouth in which Christ and the Church are sitting (see Figure One). Christ's incarnation as man means that it is completely acceptable to depict him in human form, albeit with the ubiquitous nimbus, but the Church's personification as female is more striking. The woman is unashamedly beautiful, and (to me at least) gives all the indications of being in the grip of adoring, earthly love – though depicted as a chaste, virginal and obedient bride. This is not to suggest that this illumination is anything other than orthodox; yet its orthodoxy does not completely alleviate its implicit sensuality, and even the hint of sexuality that pervades the couple's intertwined hands, intense gaze and intimately touching bodies. A pictorial representation of the *Ecclesia* tradition is more instantly arresting than even the strongest language, since its immediacy comes from ocular perception, without (necessarily) the need to translate the imagery into words. But regardless of the relative potency of a visual as opposed to a verbal image, the illumination does help to reinforce just how difficult (if not actually undesirable) it is to try to separate absolutely the sacred and profane.

Hugh of Saint-Victor (ca.1078-1141) is a medieval exegete of The Song of Songs who blurs the distinction between human and divine love, while still remaining within the allegorical tradition. His focus, in contrast to Gregory and Bede, is on the tropological interpretation of The Song, which sees the text as dealing with the love between Christ and the human soul



Figure 1. The closeness of lovers. *Sponsus* and *Sponsa* representing Christ and the Church in Bede's commentary on The Song of Songs, from St. Albans ca. 1130. Cambridge, Kings College, MS 19 fol. 21V; in Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire*. New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1998. p. 28.

(Matter 13). In the work attributed to him, the *Eulogium sponsi de sponsa*, he writes:

But, you ask, who is this bridegroom, who is his bride? The bridegroom is God, the bride is the soul. The bridegroom is at home when he fills the mind with inward joy, he goes away when he takes away the sweetness of contemplation. But by what similitude is the soul said to be the Bride of God? She is the bride because she is betrothed by the gifts of grace. She is the bride because she is joined to him by a chaste love. She is the bride, since by the breath of the Holy Spirit she is made fertile with the offspring of the virtues. (Matter 135)

Here, the soul replaces the Church as figured in the bride in The Song of Songs. This has the effect of personalising the marriage metaphor, as it brings the interpretation down to the level of the individual, and thus encourages specific identification with the bride. Hugh's tropological interpretation also highlights the more explicitly sexual metaphors of betrothal (which usually leads to marriage), fertility and reproduction.

The conspicuousness of sexuality is not just a feature of Hugh of Saint-Victor's exegesis; rather it is an important, and paradoxical feature of the *Anima* tradition of The Song of Songs as a whole. The apparently irreconcilable paradox is that 'Christian tropological interpretations of The Song of Songs stress that the marriage is consummated only through the overcoming of the earthly human body; but they do so in the most passionate body language' (Matter 137). While those exegetes of The Song of Songs who make use of a tropological interpretation of the book share with those of the *Ecclesia* tradition the desire to distance the spiritual from the literal meaning of The Song, they go further in their juxtaposition of language and intention. The result is that in the tropological tradition

we find the language of passion and union; indeed, these are the most emotionally charged and even sexually explicit biblical commentaries from the Middle Ages. Yet the message which the words convey is always one of purity, chastity and

transcendence. . . . The vivid, clear, even shockingly fleshly language of these commentaries describes a flesh-denying, spiritual union. (Matter 138)

This wide discrepancy between the ideal of bodily chastity and its profession in language charged with sensuousness cannot be explained away simply as a consequence of celibate monks writing for other celibate monks, for whom, theoretically, the body is of no interest or pleasure. They are neither so naïve, nor, often, so far removed from this world as to be unaware of secular life. More importantly, however, the source text expounds such a powerful, and passionate conception of love, using strong, vibrant metaphors, that the tropological exegetes, in order to demonstrate in their commentaries on the soul as the Bride and Christ as her Beloved their adherence to the text as it stands and faithfulness to their particular allegorical interpretation of the Canticle, must use the language of The Song as the basis of their interpretation. Another medieval exegete, William of St. Thierry (fl. 1140-1150), realises the situation perfectly when he says that one cannot but allegorise the Song ‘in images borrowed from the love of the flesh’ (Astell 24).

St Bernard of Clairvaux (ca.1090-1153), one of the founders of the rigorous Cistercian Order, is not only aware of this slippage between spiritual intention and secular expression, but also goes further in striving to make the mysteries of the divine apprehensible. The generalities of ‘Love needs no cause beyond itself, nor does it demand fruits; it has its own purpose’, and ‘I love, because I love; I love that I may love’ (IV.83.ii.4)⁶ are all very well as a broad statement of what universal love can be; yet these generalities fail to convey the sensual intensity and particularity in The Song and continued in so many commentaries. Instead, Bernard strains language to its uttermost in his attempt to speak of the ineffable, with

⁶ References to St. Bernard’s *Sermons* on The Song of Songs are referenced in the text by volume, sermon, and numbered paragraphs.

What qualities can we find within the framework of the passing world that can equal the radiance of a soul that has shed its decrepit, earthly body, and been clothed in heaven's loveliness, graced with the jewels of consummate virtue, clearer than mountain air because of its transcendence, more brilliant than the sun? (II.26.i.1)

In seeking to define the unutterable, St. Bernard is constrained by the limits of language. Since we cannot truly know God, St. John declaring that 'No man hath seen God at any time' (John 1:18), St. Bernard's closest approximation to articulating the divine reality, and ours, has to come from human experience, expressed in the language of tangibles and metaphors – however inadequate such language may prove.⁷

A third exegetical tradition, that of allegorising the Virgin Mary as both the Bride and Mother of Christ, similarly goes beyond the arbitrary boundaries of sacred and profane. The most notable feature of this branch of commentary is the way in which 'the historical fact of Mary's pregnancy justifies using the language of lovers. By definition the union between Mary and God was a real marriage consummated not only spiritually. . . but also physically as a union of the divine and human natures' (Astell 62). Irony is again at work here, however, for the exegetes attempt to reconcile the (then-unofficial)⁸ doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the Annunciation with the fact of Mary's pregnancy and delivery of Christ Incarnate. As the mortal woman singled out for God's divine favour in both the nature of her sinless birth and Christ's mysterious incarnation Mary is more than just a human mother: she is the Mother of God. Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075-1129), cannot help but break out into a direct address to Mary that clearly describes

⁷ St. Bernard shares with St. John and Donne, among others, a realisation that the language of this world is needed to express the reality, as far as we can ever know it, of the other, divine, one. Moreover, he sees this utilisation of the secular for sacred understanding as being sanctioned by the Church: 'We are taught by the authority of the Fathers and the usages of the scriptures that it is lawful to appropriate suitable analogies from the things we know, and rather than coin new words, to borrow the familiar with which these analogies may be worthily and properly clothed. Otherwise you will make an absurd attempt to teach the unknown by the unknown' (III.51.iii.7)

⁸ The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary was only declared to be explicit dogma by Pope Pius IX, in 1854.

the eternal union with God consummated in eternity in language of sexual union: 'O blessed Mary, the floodwaters of joy, the force of love, the torrent of pleasure, filled you totally, possessed you totally, intoxicated you completely, and you sensed what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, and what has not entered into the heart of man' (Astell 62).

The effect of these differing medieval commentaries, and The Song's initial assault on the constitution of sacred and profane expressions of love, is to establish a tradition of profound ambiguity. Or rather, they actively condone the acceptability of an implied dichotomy between the sacred and profane. This pseudo-dichotomy paradoxically then permits exegetes, saints, and poets, to switch freely between divine and secular language and concepts without appearing to transgress the indefinable, yet acknowledged divide that apparently separates the two.

That St Teresa of Ávila and St John of the Cross were canonised by Rome and given the titles of Doctor of the Church and Mystical Doctor respectively, attests to their orthodoxy. However, this does not prevent them from boldly and consciously ignoring the sacred/profane dichotomy when describing their sacred love for God in secular terms. In much that St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) achieved, be it her reform of the Carmelite Order and the extensive travel which that entailed, or her challenging of the Inquisition⁹ and some of her confessors, her 'forceful and vivid personality' (Peers I.xiv)

⁹ Teresa refused to be bullied or frightened by the Inquisition, considering that doctrinally she was no threat to it. Although she was never summoned to appear before it in person, she did have her *Life* subjected to its scrutiny. In fact, so 'restrictive was Spain of the Inquisition that [her] *Vida*, written at the request of her religious superiors [among them her confessor at the time, P. Baltasar Álvarez], was nonetheless initially denounced by the Inquisitors. Altered slightly and again presented to the Inquisitors by a Dominican theologian [P. Pedro Ibáñez], the *Vida* was approved and supported' (Parrish 146). Her defiance of the Inquisition was, nonetheless, very clear in her *Life*: 'people came to me in great concern to say that these were bad times and it might be that something would be alleged against me and I should have to go before the Inquisition. But that only amused me and made me laugh, because I never had any fear about this. I knew quite well that in matters of faith no one would ever find me transgressing even the smallest ceremony of the Church, and that for the Church or for any truth of Holy Scripture I would undertake to die a thousand deaths.' *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*. Ed. and trans. E. Allison Peers. London: Sheed & Ward, 1982. Vol. 1, p. 225. All quotations from Teresa's writings, unless otherwise specified, will be from this edition, referenced in the text by volume and page number.

was constant. Importantly, her writings display this strength of will coupled with an inability often to be anything other than 'colloquial and matter-of-fact in her language' (I.xiv). What makes this down-to-earth language of St. Teresa's more than just a stylistic quirk or scholarly affectation (she had no formal theological or literary training), is her consistent employment of ordinary, secular images to describe the most profoundly sacred mystical experiences.

St. Teresa has been accused of excessive sensuality and eroticism precisely because her language so explicitly combines the highest attainable state of mystical perfection (the Spiritual Marriage) with the emotions and experiences of this world. It is true that for St. Teresa 'the inseparability of the sensuous and spiritual' (Petersson 38) is absolute, yet she is precise in her imagery, and she is no sensationalist. She is clear that the 'celebration of [Christ's] Spiritual Marriage with [the soul]' (II.329) is purely spiritual, and separated from the body. In this respect St. Teresa is unequivocally following the *Anima* exegetical tradition. She does not therefore assume that the body is to be despised, however, for elsewhere she speaks of

the deepest love, newly enkindled, for One Who as we see, has so deep a love for so loathsome a worm that He seems not to be satisfied by literally drawing the soul to Himself, but will also have the body, mortal though it is, and befouled as is its clay by all the offences it has committed. (I.121)

In her acceptance of the fallen, imperfect body as worthy of God's love she differs from medieval exegetes, whose allegorical interpretations of The Song of Songs seek to direct attention away from the body and its attendant dangers.

Significantly, St. Teresa's divergence of opinion with The Song's exegetes over the merits of the body is part of her general departure from a strict adherence to The Song's allegorical tradition. It is not that she ignores this tradition, but rather that '[h]er affinity to the Canticle and its tradition is more in attitude than in words or ideas' (Hill 33). Sometimes she does quote

from the Cantic in her writing, as with 'How true are the words in The Song: "My Beloved to me and I to my Beloved and my Beloved to me [sic]"' (II.417). Or she gives us this: "'Thy breasts are better than wine, for they give off fragrance of sweet odours.'" Oh, my daughters, what tremendous secrets there are in these words! May Our Lord grant us to experience them, for it is with extreme difficulty that they can be described' (II.383). Yet she is just as likely to use her own words in an effort to record her revelations and visions adequately and coherently.

Hence it is when St. Teresa explains her sacred love for God in her own, often-secular imagery that we are made aware of just how far she goes beyond any arbitrary divine/profane distinction. A striking example of this is her justification, when writing for the nuns in her care as Mother Founder of the convent of St Joseph, Ávila, of their calling themselves the brides of Christ:

Why, God save us, when a woman in this world is about to marry, she knows beforehand whom she is to marry, what sort of person he is and what property he possesses. Shall we not then, who are already betrothed, think about our Spouse before we are wedded to Him and he takes us home to be with Him? If these thoughts are not forbidden to those who are betrothed to men here on earth, how can we be forbidden to discover Who this Man is, Who is His Father, what is the country to which He will take me, what are the riches with which He promises to endow me, what is His rank, how can I best make Him happy, what can I do that will give Him pleasure, and how can I bring my rank in order with His. (II.96)

St. Teresa's description of what it means to be a bride of Christ draws unambiguously upon the secular forms and observances of marriage, sixteenth-century Spanish-style, to illustrate the nature of a religious vocation. Her reasoning for so obviously comparing the rituals of earthly courtship and wifely-obedience with the spiritual obedience and devotion recommended to nuns rests on her logical point that it is not forbidden for professed religious to think of their commitment to God in such terms. What

results is an unusually vivid example of the secular being invoked for a sacred purpose.

Even when St. Teresa's imagery is more closely tied to The Song of Songs, she still produces a powerful synthesis of divine intent with secular expression. In her explanation of one of the higher states of meditative prayer, the Prayer of Quiet, she again uses as the basis for subsequent discussion the verse, 'Thy breasts are better than wine, for they give off fragrance of sweet odours' (Song of Songs I:2). She writes of how, in this state of prayer, the soul feels such joy that '[it] is so deeply inebriated and absorbed that it seems to be beside itself and in a kind of Divine intoxication, knowing not what it is desiring or saying, or asking for' (II.384). When in the next paragraph the soul is personified as the Bride, it takes on the attitude of a passive lover engaging in a passionate embrace with her beloved. Hence, 'when this most wealthy Spouse desires to enrich and comfort the Bride still more, He draws her so closely to Him that she is like one who swoons from excess of pleasure and joy and seems to be suspended in those Divine arms and drawn near to that sacred side and to those Divine breasts' (II.384). By qualifying her illustration with the adjective 'Divine', St. Teresa leaves no doubt as to the sacred nature of the embrace. Even so, her qualification does not quite erase the (lingering) physicality of her description.

An outstanding visual example of the sacred and secular united in St. Teresa's love for God is the sculpture, 'The Ecstasy of St. Teresa', by Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). It is found in the Cornaro Chapel, in the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, in Rome, and dates from between 1647 and 1652 (see Figure Two). In it, Bernini captures St. Teresa in a moment of spiritual ecstasy, where she is '[a]lmost suspended between heaven and earth' (Petersson 31). His source for 'The Ecstasy' is a vision of St. Teresa's, in which she is visited by a spear-wielding angel. She describes her vision thus:

It pleased the Lord that I should sometimes see the following vision. I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in

Figure 2. 'The Ecstasy of St. Teresa' by Gianlorenzo Bernini. 1645-52. Coronaro Chapel. Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome; in Robert Wallace, *The World of Bernini 1598-1680*. Time-Life Library of Art. Nederland: Time-Life International, ca. 1970, p. 152.



bodily form – a type of vision which I am not in the habit of seeing, except very rarely. . . . It pleased the Lord that I should see this angel in the following way. He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire. They must be those who are called [seraphim]: they do not tell me their names but I am well aware that there is a great difference between certain angels and others still, of a kind that I could not possibly explain. In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God. It is not bodily pain, but spiritual, though the body has a share in it – indeed, a great share. So sweet are the colloquies of love which pass between the soul and God that if anyone thinks I am lying I beseech God, in His goodness, to give him the same experience. (I.192-3)

Common to both St. Teresa's written account of her vision and Bernini's interpretation is the sense of her complete abandonment of body and soul to the divine experience. The sculpture shows particularly clearly just how close this abandonment comes to appearing erotic, with the seraph's winged posture, physical perfection and weapon of choice – the golden tipped spear – evocative of so many depictions of Cupid. St. Teresa herself, though clothed in her habit, can seem to be close to orgasm – as witness the eighteenth-century critic (the Frenchman Charles de Brosses), who was heard to mutter, “‘If this is Divine Love, I know all about it’” (Varriano 175).

For St John of the Cross (1542-1591), St. Teresa's co-reformer of the Carmelites, too, the delineation of his ardent, mystical love for God necessitates an unashamedly passionate use of secular imagery. In two of his poems, the 'Spiritual Canticle', and the 'Dark Night' it is particularly evident

that he uses 'the only language available to him, that of erotic love with a divine intention' (*Alchemist* 66).¹⁰ Despite John's obvious reliance on The Song of Songs for both the form and content of the 'Spiritual Canticle' – the sub-title to the second redaction of the poem reads in part: 'Exposition of the songs dealing with the exercise of love between the soul and her spouse Christ' (*Alchemist* 117) – he was nonetheless in trouble with the Inquisition because of it.¹¹ The dichotomy between the Inquisition's condemnation of John's poem and its incontrovertible basis in The Song of Songs is almost laughable (were it not for that institution's real power in matters of heresy), because of John's constant orthodoxy. His poems are still very much within the tradition of the medieval exegetes of The Song, and he is quite legitimately making use of a truth which Donne later remarks upon in one of his sermons: namely, that 'GOD is *Love*, and the *Holy Ghost* is amorous in his *Metaphors*; everie where his Scriptures abound with notions of *Love*, of *Spouse*, of *Husband*, and *Marriadge-Songs*, and *Marriadge-Supper*, and *Marriadge-Bedde*' (*Sermons* 7.87).

And yet St. John manages, in the 'Dark Night', to produce in its readers a similar reaction to that of Bernini's eighteenth-century critic: the always-nebulous divide between the sacred and the profane has utterly disappeared. Accordingly, although 'the beloved' of line 25 is the Spouse of the Song, St. John frames his revelation of the union of Christ and the soul in language 'that feels, in human terms, like the ultimate union of lovers; only these two lovers are not two human beings: one is human, the other divine' (de Nicolás 67). It is readily apparent how well St. John succeeds in intertwining the sacred and profane when we consider E. T. Dicken's

¹⁰ All quotes from St John of the Cross's poetry are taken from Antonio de Nicolás's *St John of the Cross: Alchemist of the Soul*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, and referenced, where appropriate, by page or line numbers in the text.

¹¹ Antonio de Nicolás explains the Inquisition's condemnation of John's 'Canticle' as being connected with its reaction to the fashionable groups of '*iluminados*', '*abandonados*', and '*beatas*' that were widespread throughout Spain from about the 1560s onwards. He writes that 'they had become a universal fashion, that "the whole country was covered by the doctrines of the *alumbrados* as if by a plague," and that eroticism and sexuality had taken over religious practice among people who behaved unethically under the pretence of '*alumbramiento*,' divine inspiration' (240, note 4).

comment: 'Suppose we were to light upon the poem, knowing nothing of its author and his environment, what should we think of it? It would scarcely occur to us that it was in any sense a religious poem at all' (Dickens 30).

Dickens goes on to ask, 'Should we not find there [in the poem] simply the exquisitely tender lyric of a girl in virginal innocence secretly keeping tryst with her lover?' (31). Reading the last four stanzas of the 'Dark Night' we see just how difficult it is to determine where (if at all) the sacred ends and the secular begins:

O night! O guide!
 O night more loving than the dawn!
 O night that joined
 Lover with the beloved,
 Beloved in the lover transformed!

Upon my flowering breasts,
 Which I had saved for him alone,
 There he slept,
 While I caressed his hair,
 And the cedar's breeze gave us air.

As I spread his tresses,
 The fresh wind from the turret,
 Wounds me in the neck as it presses
 With its serene hand,
 Suspending all my senses with its caresses.

I lose myself and remain
 With my face on the Beloved inclined;
 All has come to rest,
 I abandon all my cares
 There, among the lilies, to die. (21-40)

For St. John, the munificence of this union of human and divine 'merits expression in the boldest language earthly joy can afford', even if 'no human analogy can do justice to this union' (Dickens 31); he can do no more.

In his own way, too, the Jesuit and recusant poet, Robert Southwell (1561-1595) unintentionally startles a reader with the intensity of his language and the forcefulness with which he unwaveringly carries out his

poetic persuasion of his audience. Like his contemporaries, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, and indeed all of the other exegetes and poets considered in this chapter, Southwell is undeniably orthodox. The fact that he (a Jesuit priest) remained 'thoroughly orthodox' (Janelle 268) in his treatment of divine love owes much to his acceptance of 'the ancient and traditional interpretation of the Canticle as an allegory [of] the love of Christ for His Church' (Scallon 203). It was therefore 'natural' (Scallon 203) for him to have used this biblical book as a basis for much of his poetry. A good example of just how closely Southwell adhered to his source, while imbuing it with his own passion, is his cry, from his *Hundred Meditations*, 'Come unto Thy God, O my soul, embrace Thy Spouse, Jesus Christ, be importunate with Him till He give Thee His holy love, that by loving Him Thou mayest know Him, and by knowing Him mayest love Him for evermore' (Janelle 183). What is important about Southwell's poetic orthodoxy (he uses the canonically-sanctioned Song of Songs as a starting-point for his verse), is that for him it is inextricably connected to his reason for writing poetry.

One of the Jesuits sent from the Continent to England as part of the Society's English Mission (he arrived in July 1586), Southwell sought to support and give pastoral care to those English families and individuals still holding to the Catholic faith, in the face of persistent and organised persecution by the State.¹² This single-minded commitment to his priestly vocation, (which would ultimately result in his martyrdom), is also that which Southwell demonstrates in his poetry. In a sense, he has a poetic mission concomitant with that of his pastoral work. Appropriately, Southwell produces poetry that 'summons his countrymen to live lives of moral integrity, to seek spiritual strength in humility and religious love' (*Poems* xxix). Such clarity of focus is not restricted to the poems themselves,

¹² James McDonald and Nancy Brown note that the suffering of English Catholics was particularly severe during the summer of 1588, when the Spanish Armada posed its greatest threat to national security (*Poems*, xxviii).

for in his defence of poetry against its perceived abuse by idle courtiers¹³ Southwell distinguishes himself by the unfaltering assurance with which his poetry upholds and pursues the ideals set out in 'The Author to his loving Cosen'. His scathing criticism of fashionable (secular) poetry and poets, and his avowal of the divine nature of true poetry is worth quoting at length:

POETS by abusing their talent, and making the follies and fayninges of love, the customary subject of their base endeavours, have so discredited this facultie, that a Poet, a Lover, and a Liar, are by many reckoned but three wordes of one signification. But the vanity of men, cannot counterpoyse the authority of God, who delivering many partes of Scripture in verse, and by his Apostle willing us to exercise our devotion in Himnes and Spirituall Sonnets, warrenteth the Arte to bee good, and the use allowable. . . . But even in the Old and New Testament it hath bene used by men of greatest Pietie, in matters of most devotion. Christ himselfe by making a Himne, the conclusion of his last Supper, and the Prologue to the first Pageant of his Passion, gave his Spouse a methode to imitate, as in the office of the Church it appeareth, and all men a paterne to know the true use of this measured and footed stile. But the Divell as hee affecteth Deitie, and seeketh to have all the complements of Divine honor applied to his service, so hath he among the rest possessed also most Poets with his idle fansies. For in lieu of solomne and devout matter, to which in duety they owe their abilities, they now busy themselves in expressing such passions, as onely serve for testimonies to how unwoorthy affections they have wedded their wils. (*Poems* 1)

Yet what marks Southwell as unique amongst the exegetes and poets discussed in this chapter is the stark juxtaposition of asceticism and sensuality in his treatment of love. Although he shares with all of them life as a celibate religious, and also, therefore, an understandable disdain for the material things of this world, Southwell differs in the depth of his disregard

¹³ Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy* (1595) is perhaps the best-known example of the argument for a poet's – and poetry's – having moral and social obligations that go far beyond following fashion, or indulging in bad verse. Like Southwell, George Herbert declares his 'resolution to be, that my poor Abilities in *Poetry*, shall be all, and ever consecrated to Gods glory' (Herbert 363), an intention which is particularly evident in his poems 'Jordan (I)' and 'Jordan (II)'. In 'Jordan (I)' he asks, 'Who says that fictions onely and false hair / Become a verse? Is there no truth in beautie?' (Herbert 56).

(almost hatred even), of such things; part of his life's work is to follow determinedly Christ's example to be in this world, but not of it (John 8:23). The distance between him and St John of the Cross, or St Bernard, for example, can perhaps best be illustrated with the help of St Augustine, who denounces the 'sins of the flesh' (2.1.43)¹⁴ and its accompanying 'depravity' (3.3.57) as impediments to truly loving and serving God. In this respect, St. Augustine is in agreement with Southwell. Augustine's condemnation of sensuality, as the 'disease of the flesh' (6.12.128), is not, however, as absolute as it appears. He has felt what it is to love a friend inordinately, of 'loving a man who was mortal as though he was never going to die' (4.7.79). His exclamation, 'What madness to love a man as more than something human!' (4.7.78), too, is prompted not so much by disgust, as by his knowledge of the joy, and its companions, pain and loss, that are inherently part of our mortal nature. Essentially, what is at the root of this distinction is that whereas Augustine accepts that 'human nature can ennoble a man[, o]ne looks in vain in Southwell's verse for a clear expression of this profound insight' (Scallon 136).

Consequently, Southwell's dismissal of what I can only describe as an awareness of humanity's goodness at the secular level has a significant effect on his poetry. Throughout his verse '[h]is general attitude towards profane love is one of uncompromising denunciation. He never mentions it but as a dangerous snare, an allurements to man to forsake God' (Janelle 269). His belief that 'All beauties base, all graces are impure: / That do thy erring thoughtes from God remove' ('Lewd Love is Losse' 3-4)¹⁵ is also true of how he would ideally see us use and respect passion.¹⁶ Hence, in 'Lifes death loves life' he presents a contrasting exemplum of what love ought to be:

¹⁴ The references are to the book, chapter, and page number in the Penguin edition of the *Confessions*.

¹⁵ All quotations from Southwell's poetry, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the edition edited by James McDonald and Nancy Brown, and referenced by line numbers in the text.

¹⁶ In his dedication to 'Mistres D.A.', at the beginning of his prose work, *Marie Magdalens Funeral Teares*, he writes, 'Passions I allow and loves I approve, onley I would wishe that

Life out of earth hath no abroad,
 In earth love hath no place,
 Love settled hath her joyes in heav'n,
 In earth love all her grace.

Mourne therefore no true lovers death:
 Life onely him annoyes.
 And when he taketh leave of life,
 Then love beginnes his joyes. (25-30)

Here Southwell declares that true love, with God as its object, is not really at home on earth, since in this life we are necessarily separated from God by our sins. Only through our physical death are we able to love completely, for 'love to begin his joyes'.

Even when Southwell seems to be ambiguous in either his choice of subject, or in his language, and therefore over-stepping his self-imposed distinction between the essence of sacred and profane love, he is still true to his poetic and moral aims. A succinct example of apparent slippage in language is found in his religious parody, 'The death of our Ladie', the eighth in his 'Sequence on the Virgin Mary and Christ'. In spite of its title, there is one particular moment of confusion in the poem, when the line 'Her face a heaven, two planettes were her eyes' (13) seems to resonate with echoes of the secular blazon, and perhaps even something of a Petrarchan sonnet. Yet the very next line, 'Whose gracious light did make our clearest day', with its enjambment and first-person plural pronoun 'our', quickly reminds us whom we are praising. This is no country wench or recalcitrant mistress, but the 'Quene of Earth' (3).

men would alter their object and better their intent. For passions being sequels of our nature, and allotted unto us as the handmaidens of reason: there can be no doubt, but as their author is good, and their end godly: so their use tempered in the meane, implieth no offence. Love is but the infancy of true charity, yet sucking natures teate, and swathed in her bandes, which then groweth to perfection, when faith besides naturall motives proposeth higher and nobler groundes of amitye'.

Something similar also happens in 'Marie Magdalens complaint at Christs death', where Southwell frames the Magdalene's grief in the language of parted lovers:

With my love my life was nestled
 In the sonne of happinesse:
 From my love, my life is wrested
 To a world of heavinesse
 O, let love my life remove,
 Sith I live not where I love. (25-30)

Referring to her love as the 'sonne of happinesse' establishes him without doubt as Christ, even though earlier she expresses her passionate distress in language not unlike that of an abandoned lover. For instance, she accuses Christ, 'O true love' (13), of forsaking her, and, like her secular counterpart, she wishes for death to remove her from a mortal life that is 'tedious' (14) because of the beloved's absence. Most importantly, however, Southwell uses Mary Magdalene's contemporary popularity as a means to his desired end: to bring 'men into contact with God' (Scallan 77). While he may occasionally appear to use sensuality, here and elsewhere in his verse, in ways approaching St. John of the Cross's exuberance, Southwell's practice is to remain consistently rigorous in his application of secular love for sacred ends.

In this respect, Southwell could not be more different from Richard Crashaw (ca.1613-1649), for whom the divide between profane and divine love is much more indistinct. For many readers and critics, Crashaw's poetry is an extreme example of what happens when the expected dichotomy between the sacred and secular is ignored.¹⁷ Although his orthodoxy should hardly have to be defended, it is worth stressing how close his poetry always

¹⁷ Anthony Low comments perceptively that '[Crashaw's] emphasis on pleasure and gratification of the senses has offended the sensibilities even of some of his stoutest defenders. He has fed our worst suspicions about the psychological linkages between sex and religion', and that 'not many of us are simultaneously and equally responsive to the pleasures of sexual gratification and of religious devotion' (130).

remains to the Scriptural texts upon which he expands.¹⁸ In fact, Crashaw's focus in all of his sacred poetry is on the 'manifestation and celebration of divine love' (Healy 11). Despite his fundamental orthodoxy, however, he is subject to comments such as this, by Joan Bennett: 'The images of the ascetic Crashaw are far more predominantly sexual than those of Donne, who had known the pleasures of sensuality' (104). The basis of her implicit criticism (since, apparently, asceticism and sensuality are supposed to be mutually exclusive qualities), is, I think, that as a Catholic priest Crashaw openly and continually combines hyperbole and sensuousness in his poetry.¹⁹ Crucially, he knows that love is not and never can be dimorphous. He therefore produces poetry 'where images and language which initially appear designed to produce a sensual and physical effect are also directed at spiritual ends – a combination uncomfortable for most modern readers' (Healy 142).

Hence Crashaw's disregard for the sacred/profane dichotomy appears in a variety of ways throughout his poems. Anthony Low notes that '[a]n extraordinary number of Crashaw's major devotional poems are concerned with women', and this has led, in the past, in part, to vigorous criticisms of the 'feminine' nature of his poetry, and charges against him of 'aberrancy, foreign effeminacy, and bad taste' (125).²⁰ The misunderstanding, or at least the change in critical taste implicit in such criticism, is shown up by just one example of Crashaw's orthodox, yet sensuous use of The Song of Songs. In 'Ode on a Prayer-Book', the concluding verse is a joyful, rapturous description of the soul's marriage to Christ, as first allegorised in the Song. In

¹⁸ Thomas Healy comments: 'Even at points where his verse appears at its most exaggerated and sensuous, Crashaw has carefully based his language and imagery on Scripture, thus providing a "truth" both in what his images figure and in what they denote literally, as well as indicating divine authority behind their employment' (in Roberts 56).

¹⁹ Healy explains that in Crashaw's case, 'Hyperbole is used to amplify dignity. . . . Exaggerating an object is designed to emphasise not the object itself, but what it spiritually represents. Hyperbole acts to direct attention away from the literal, leading the reader towards an awareness of a greater religious reality which is being intimated' (139).

²⁰ See particularly Maureen Sabine's *Feminine Engendered Faith: the Poetry of John Donne and Richard Crashaw*, for a feminist perspective on, and defence of, the spiritually 'feminine' Crashaw against the 'masculine' Donne.

it the faithful feminine soul is rewarded for the steadfastness of her love for her Spouse. Her 'blissfull heart [shall] hold fast / Her heavnly arm-full' (111-112) and she is finally given the 'Happy proof!' wherein

She shal discover
What joy, what blisse,
How many Heav'ns at once it is
To have her GOD become her LOVER. (121-4)

On an individual level, St Teresa's record of her journey towards her Spiritual Marriage with Christ provides Crashaw with an important source for his three poems in praise of the Saint. Although he probably never saw Bernini's sculpture, 'The Ecstasy of St. Teresa', (the Coronaro Chapel in which Bernini's sculpture is found was not completed until 1652), he captures in his poem, 'A Hymn to Sainte Teresa',²¹ the same ineffable sense of St. Teresa's suspension between the secular world and the divine heavens.²² The poem is more than just an account of the transverberation of her heart (as her vision of the seraph piercing her heart is known), but it is when Crashaw describes this particular moment in St. Teresa's life that we sense the close affinity between them. He tells St. Teresa:

THOU art love's victime; and must dy
A death more mysticall and high.
Into love's armes thou shalt let fall
A still-surviving funerall.
His is the DART must make the DEATH
Whose stroke shall tast thy hallow'd breath,
A Dart thrice dip't in that rich flame
Which writes thy spouse's radiant Name
Upon the roof of Heav'n. (75-83)

²¹ All quotations from Crashaw's poetry are taken from George Walton Williams' 1972 edition, and referenced in the text by line numbers.

²² In 'A Hymn' Crashaw says of Teresa's actual death, 'so fast / Shalt Thou exhale to Heavn at last / In a resolving Sigh, and then - / O what? Ask not the Tongues of men, / Angells cannot tell' (116-119).

Crashaw recalls further St. Teresa's literal identification with the Bride of Christ when, later in the poem, he develops the metaphor of spiritual marriage:

O what delight, when reveal'd LIFE shall stand
And teach thy lipps heav'n with his hand;
On which thou now maist to thy wishes
Heap up thy consecrated kisses. (129-32)

The metaphor continues through her being joined with the 'KING thy Spouse' (143) in marriage, to her fecundity in bearing the 'Sons of thy vowes, / The virgin-births with which thy sovereign spouse / Made fruitfull thy fair soul' (167-9). St. Teresa's life and writings encourage Crashaw to salute her as 'O thou undaunted daughter of desires!' ('The Flaming Heart'), for I think he saw in her a woman who understood the futility of trying to separate spiritual and secular love when striving for absolute love for God.

'Alexias. The Complaint of the Forsaken Wife of St. Alexis' and 'A Song' are two poems that take the ambiguity inherent in the absence of a sacred/profane dichotomy in another direction from that of Crashaw's ecstatic treatment of St. Teresa, one that leads eventually to parody. George Walton Williams' head-note to 'Alexias' records that St Alexis was a popular legendary saint of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, whose achievements included 'mortification of the flesh, poverty, and contrition' (244). Crashaw's poem is, however, written from the perspective of his wife, Alexias, and framed in the language of a Petrarchan lover. Interestingly, her complaint against her husband is not that he has died or found another, as is so often the case with a Petrarchan youth's beloved, but that because of his desire for religiously-motivated sexual abstinence, he has 'try'd to make a WIDOW ere a WIFE' of her (6). Alexis's marital relations are not helped by the fact that he has also literally wandered off, the thought of which provokes 'new teares' in her (7), since she neither knows why nor whither he has gone. She laments her loss in true Petrarchan style, and promises that if, in her

efforts to find Alexis, she should drown at sea, her death at least will prove an example to other lovers of her faithfulness to her spouse (32). As with countless others before her, Alexias can only protest at her innocence in the matter, and reiterate her love, saying, 'And I, what is my crime, I cannot tell. / Unlesse it be a crime to'have lov'd too well' (19-20).

Crashaw further shows, through parody, just how indeterminate love can be, when, in 'A Song', he parodies 'a thousand Italian love songs and Elizabethan madrigals about dying from the intense experience of love – that is, from the ecstasy of sexual consummation' (Low 128). Yet in order to make this religious parody work, Crashaw must use the language of earthly lovers, language that is overt throughout:

LORD, when the sense of thy sweet grace
Sends up my soul to seek thy face.
Thy blessed eyes breed such desire,
I dy in love's delicious Fire.
O love, I am thy SACRIFICE.
Be still triumphant, blessed eyes.
Still shine on me, dear suns! that I
Still may behold, though still I dy.

Second part.

Though still I dy, I live again;
Still longing so to be still slain,
So gainfull is such losse of breath,
I dy even in desire of death.
Still live in me this loving strife
Of living DEATH and dying LIFE.
For while thou sweetly slayest me,
Dead to my selfe, I live in Thee. (1-16)

What we soon discover is that 'there is only a hairline's difference between the poem and its secular exemplars, which in turn had borrowed earlier from the language of sacred devotion. If we change the first word from "Lord" to "Love," the poem becomes entirely ambiguous' (Low 129). Although Crashaw seeks to exert poetic superiority over secular love poems by his parodic ridicule of them, the mere fact that he must use similar imagery

inevitably leads to a blurring both of his choice of subject and expression of love.

Ultimately, the disparate exegetes and poets discussed in this chapter are unified by their common perception that love, whether directed towards God, or to those around us, does not fit any one absolute definition. Love, by its very breadth of manifestation, demands from those who seek to contain it in sermons, exegesis or poetry an equally open-minded acceptance that while it can be utilised for sacred or secular ends, it can rarely be confined within the limits of one or the other. In practice, the arbitrarily imposed dichotomy between profane and secular love will always break down under the pressure of human experience, a constantly-changing irony captured succinctly by John Donne in one of his sermons:

Love is so noble, so sovereign an Affection, as that it is due to very few things, and very few things worthy of it. Love is a Possessory Affection, it delivers over him that loves into the possession of that that he loves, it is a transmutatory Affection, it changes him that loves, into the very nature of that that he loves, and he is nothing else. (*Sermons* 1.184)

Chapter 3: Petrarchism and the *Elegies*

Before I focus on the *Elegies* I believe it is appropriate briefly to discuss Petrarchism, which is perhaps the closest secular equivalent to the exegetical tradition associated with The Song of Songs (see Chapter Two). In the case of Petrarchism the love-struck speaker's distancing and elevation of the unattainable beloved is often described in metaphors from earthly life, including 'precious metals, flowers, and jewels as symbols of aspects of the lady's beauty, and fire as metaphor for lust and ice, its opposite, for chastity' (Preminger 902-3). These metaphorical devices, along with the cataloguing of the beloved's physical features are a way of raising her above other women, of placing her on a pedestal, of striving to make the human divine. Petrarchism has its origins in the poetry of the great fourteenth-century poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-74), who in his 366 *Canzoniere*, or *Rime sparse*, immortalises in fourteen-line verses his twenty-year adoration of a woman called Laura. For nearly three hundred years Petrarch, and all that came to be synonymous with his poetic practices, known as Petrarchism, was one of the predominant influences in European poetry. Indeed, in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries 'Petrarch's name achieved adjectival status, denoting the elegant lamentatory style and grieving mind of the unrequited lover' (Roche 1).

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (ca.1517-1547) were the first to introduce the Petrarchan poetic mode and sonnet form (an octave followed by a sestet) to England with their translations from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. George Puttenham, in his *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), praises the two poets thus: 'Henry Earle of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt, betweene whom I finde very little difference, I repute them (as before) for the two chief lanternes of light to all others that have since employed their pennes upon English Poesie. . . . in all imitating very naturally and studiously their Master Francis Petrarcha' (62). They differ from

their 'Master' Petrarch in one important respect, however, for they share with those English Petrarchists who follow them in what Gary Waller describes as the 'relative neglect by English poets of the spiritual dimensions of Petrarch's love for Laura' (79), which brings with it a concomitant rarity of religious terminology in their poetry.

Wyatt's limited use of sacred imagery is unerringly negative in tone, for he uses it to reinforce the hard-hearted cruelty of his beloved. In 'Behold, love, thy power how she dispiseth!' the speaker laments that 'The holy oth, wherof she taketh no cure / Broken she hath: and yet she bideth sure, / Right at her ease: and litle she dredeth' (Wyatt 1). This is hardly an encouraging picture of the lady's constancy and fidelity either to the speaker or to personified love, in whose name she has made the oath, and instead suggests her total disregard for breaking the 'holy oth' and its accompanying pledge of honourable behaviour. Similarly, in 'Will ye se what wonders love hath wrought?' the power of love's positive transcendence is not to be found, a situation that is highlighted when compared with Donne's 'The Relique', whose speaker declares:

All women shall adore us, and some men;
And since at such times, miracles are sought,
I would that age were by this paper taught
What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought. (19-22)

In Wyatt's poem the speaker's admonition to 'come and loke at me; / There need no where els to be sought, / Yn me ye maye [love's wonders] see' (Wyatt 234-5) is an invitation to inspect a campaign of destruction at the hands of the beloved. In contrast to the couple in 'The Relique', Wyatt's speaker marvels at what he calls the 'Most monstrous thing of kinde' to which he 'maye beste compared bee' (Wyatt 235). 'My love is lyke unto th'eternall fyre' is another unequivocal warning about the pain and misery of love, phrased in the language of divine punishment and ultimate judgement. Wyatt's use of religious imagery in this poem is interesting because it is not

God sitting in judgement on the speaker but the unattainable beloved lady. While it is his love that is 'lyke unto th'eternall fyre' (Wyatt 210) and therefore the immediate cause of his torment, the lady is, however obliquely, the one who has consigned him to this fate. She has the divine power by which 'hell may be felld or dethe assayle' (Wyatt 210), and as such condemns him, like the sinners eternally removed from the presence of God, to an existence which he likens to 'those whyche therin do remayne / Whose grevous paynes ys but theyre gret desire / To se the syght whyche they may not attayne' (Wyatt 210).

By contrast, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey's use of sacred imagery in one of his poems, 'Set me wheras the sonne dothe perche the grene', mitigates, to some degree, the typical Petrarchan attitude of despair and frustration. In the poem the speaker avows:

Set me in earthe, in heaven, or yet in hell;
In hill, in dale, or in the fowming floode;
Thrawle, or at large, alive whersoo I dwell;
Sike, or in healthe; in yll fame, or in good;
Yours will I be. (Surrey 58)

William Sessions notes that the last two lines particularly suggest the Catholic marriage ceremony, and the form, "'I N. take thee N. to my weded wife to haue and to hold from this day forward for bettere for wers for richere for pouerer: in sykness and in hele tyl dethe vs departe'" (50). This subtle evoking of the marriage sacrament and the speaker's promise that 'Yours will I be', although phrased in the future tense, and therefore containing a degree of conditionality, shows the speaker as yet hopeful of a time to come when the couple can be together, joined by a love that he wishes to be as holy and permanent as a marriage sanctified by God.

Following Wyatt and Surrey a whole school of English Petrarchists, loosely assembled, ply their craft. These include Michael Drayton (1563-1631), Edmund Spenser (ca.1552-99), Sir Walter Raleigh (ca.1552-1618), Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) and Lady Mary Wroth (1587-ca.1651). Puttenham

held Raleigh and Sidney in particularly high regard, writing of them that 'For eglogue and pastoral Poesie, Sir *Philip Sidney*. . . for dittie and amourous Ode I finde Sir Walter Rawleyghs vayne most loftie' (63), with Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* considered 'the crowning achievement in golden Petrarchan love poetry in England' (Low 13).

Although Sidney's use of sacred imagery in *Astrophil and Stella* is sparing, like that of Surrey before him, and Lady Mary Wroth after him, his occasional employment of religious metaphors helps to depict a love that goes beyond the standard Petrarchan situation of an idealised female beauty and her love-sick, anguished or desperate male lover. While *Astrophil and Stella* has its share of stock-in-trade Petrarchan images – Stella as the 'sure heire of heav'nly blisse' (Sidney 190), her 'heavenly face' (Sidney 185), and powerful 'heav'nly beames' (Sidney 167) – there are instances where, in an uncanny foreshadowing of Donne, Sidney uses sacred imagery in an altogether less conventionally Petrarchan manner. In 'Sonnet 4' Astrophil writes, 'I sweare, my heart such one shall shew to thee, / That shrines in flesh so true a Deitie, / That *Virtue*, thou thy selfe shalt be in love' (Sidney 167). Stella's perfection is such that Astrophil sees her as a deity in earthly form, worthy to be the instrument by which Virtue may show itself. Astrophil's subsequent contention that 'Vertue of late, with vertuous care to ster / Love of her selfe, takes *Stella's* shape, that she / To mortall eyes might sweetly shine in her' (Sidney 177) not only reinforces the notion of physical and spiritual perfection co-existing in Stella but also brings to mind the lines in 'A Valediction: of the Booke' where Donne says, 'For, though minde be the heaven, where love doth sit, / Beauty' a convenient type may be to figure it' (34-6). While for Astrophil Virtue may take Love's place in the mind's heavenly seat, there is yet the sense, as with Donne, that virtue or love can only be fully understood when they have some kind of physical manifestation. In 'Sonnet 71' Sidney switches from using Stella's beauty as the exemplum of virtue to declaring,

Who will in fairest booke of Nature know,
 How Vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be,
 Let him but learne of *Love* to reade in thee,
Stella, those faire lines, which true goodnesse show. (210)

There is another echo here of 'A Valediction: of the Booke', for although Astrophil speaks of the 'fairest booke of Nature' rather than the book of Love, he desires, like Donne, that his book should be 'as long-liv'd as the elements, / Or as the worlds forme' ('Booke' 19-20). He hopes that his book will be the eternising conceit by which both Stella and his '*Love*' are immortalised for those Donne elsewhere describes as 'profane men' ('The Undertaking' 22).

Lady Mary Wroth is as dedicated a Petrarchan poet as her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney, but is more explicit in seeking the 'reconciliation of physical and spiritual love' (Paulissen 116) in her poetry. She does use some of the stereotypical images of 'holy fires', 'sacrifies', 'martir stakes' and the 'Pheanix' (Wroth 200) in her verse and in one sonnet she writes that 'loves sacred fire / Must aspire / Transcendant to the highest powers' (Wroth 202); however, this is not the limit of her utilisation of sacred imagery. Wroth's most unambiguous statement about the intertwining of the divine and the human is contained in one of the sonnets in her sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, in which the speaker praises 'pure, and spottles love which shall not vade / While soule, and body are together found' (Wroth 102). These lines are a positive affirmation of the constancy and completeness of love not unlike Donne's 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning'. Another of Wroth's sonnets includes lines that recall even more closely the separation of the sanctified lovers from the 'layetie' (8), those 'Dull sublunary lovers' (13), in 'A Valediction'. Wroth writes:

Itt is nott love which you poore fooles do deeme
 That doth apeare by fond, and outward showes
 Of kissing, toying, or by swearings glose,
 O noe thes are farr off from loves esteeme. (110)

She is at pains to stress that true love has a depth and richness far greater than anything 'you poore fooles' will ever know and which, because of its value and implied rarity, is hidden from those who conceive of love as mundane and ordinary. In these lines Wroth downplays the Petrarchan portrayal of love, and all the accompanying connotations of futility and rejection, in favour of a view of love that is altogether more positive and which readily admits the possibility of successful requited love that is, if not explicitly sacred, certainly dependent on uniting the physical and the spiritual.

As for Donne, the nature of his Petrarchism is a matter of some critical disagreement. Donald Guss holds that 'in subject and theme Donne's lyrics follow the Petrarchists in a general way' (50). He writes: 'there are two modes of Petrarchism. One which I call humanistic, aims at universal truths, eternal emotions, and neoclassical decorousness: it is elegant, idyllic, and sentimental. . . . Donne, however, writes in the other Petrarchan mode – that characterised by fantastic arguments, emotional extravagance, and peregrine comparisons' (18). Rosemond Tuve comments that 'to leaf through Donne or Sidney or Carew is to make a list of the old conceits – fire and ice, sighs and winds, heart wounded or besieged or made a temple, Cupid (Love with or without the capital), the eyes, the altar and so on' (422). By comparison Thomas Roache places Donne in the 'camp that has come to be known as anti-Petrarchanism, a camp putatively associated with an alleged realism in treating the subject of love, in which. . . Donne. . . [is among those] presented as a flank attack on the so-called plangencies of Petrarch and his followers (114). Yet whatever the conclusions about Donne and Petrarchism, it is true enough that he did not remain unaffected by its distinctive style and form.

* * * * *

In the twenty poems that commonly make up the *Elegies*²³ love is nothing if not changeable. Critics have variously described the depiction of love in the *Elegies* as 'misogynist and cynical' (Mousley 27); never wholly serious (Leishman 87); engaging in Ovidian game-playing (Low 27), and almost invariably witty. The fact that all of these descriptions can, and do, apply to the *Elegies* says less about an individual reader's interpretations of the poems than about the *Elegies* themselves, which share in what Andrew Mousley calls the 'hospitality of Donne's writing', whereby 'its availability for different contexts, concerns and approaches. . . also suggests the inadequacy of any one single perspective' (4-5). Accordingly the approach I want to take in this chapter centres on a belief that although the *Elegies* present secular love in a variety of ways, there is, nonetheless, almost no sustained use of sacred imagery within the sequence. What use Donne does make of such imagery and language often produces a stark local juxtaposition of sacred images with the playful, ironic, even cynical discussion of secular love. This not only makes it difficult to tell when Donne/the speaker is being serious about love, but it also heightens the disparity between the profane reality of the love in any particular elegy and the sacred imagery being used to describe it.

Perhaps more than anything else, the *Elegies* are known and justly praised as consummate examples of Donne's brilliant wit, a wit that seems, at times, to be diametrically opposite to any sustained profundity about love. In most of the *Elegies*, Donne engages in a fierce round of 'Ovidian game-playing', in which '[l]ove. . . involves secrecy, adultery, and betrayal in all directions. At best it gives the lover brief pleasure and a sense of superior cleverness for having overcome obstacles, "out-Machiaveled" other schemers and bested rivals; at worse, and more predictably, his schemes collapse and his pleasures turn to self-loathing and disgust' (Low 37-8). Hence, in 'Natures lay Ideot', the speaker's smugness at having refined his 'Natures lay

²³ Editors of Donne's *Elegies* have differing opinions as to the authenticity of several of them. Consequently, the number of *Elegies* can vary from the fifteen found in Gardner to the twenty in Patrides.

Ideot' (1)²⁴ of a mistress into a 'blis-full paradise' (24) of amorous delights quickly turns to alarm when he realises that he has no real control over either his handiwork of 'graces and good words' (25) or the body and actions of the mistress herself. Equally short-lived is any hope the speaker may have of his mistress's faithfulness in '[Recusancy]'. At the heart of Donne's conceit of the woman as an unruly river is bitterness about the ease with which she has lost interest in him and transferred her affections to another. His reaction to the woman's treatment of him is to direct his disgust and anger at her:

Yet let not thy deepe bitternesse beget
 Carelesse despaire in mee, for that will whet
 My minde to scorne; and Oh, love dull'd with paine
 Was ne'r so wise, nor well arm'd as disdaine. (35-8)

However, Donne couples with this elegiac game-playing a persistent and deliberate sense of levity, which J. B. Leishman describes thus: '[Donne's] attitude is never wholly serious – indeed in the *Elegies* it is almost wholly unserious, is never more, one might almost say, than a kind of serious trifling' (87). This cheeky seriousness manifests itself repeatedly throughout the *Elegies*, and acts as something of a lightening of – even a countermeasure to – the infidelity, distrust, amorous transience and betrayal present in the poems. Take, for instance, the final couplet of 'The Perfume'. Having railed against the hindrances of his beloved's parents, serving men, siblings and, finally, turned on his perfume for giving away his nocturnal presence in her house, he concludes: 'All my perfumes, I give most willingly / To'embalme thy father's corse; What? will hee die?' (71-72). One can distinctly hear the facetiousness and feigned surprise in the speaker's voice at the very idea that his beloved's father will one day die, thereby freeing them (should their love last that long), from the need for deviousness and secrecy.

²⁴ All quotations from the *Elegies* are from Helen Gardner's 1965 Clarendon edition of *The Elegies and Songs and Sonets*, and referenced by line numbers in the text.

In 'The Bracelet', too, although it assumes a different guise, the speaker's 'serious trifling' in his invective against the supposed bracelet-thief is stimulated by more than circumstance. He begins his cursing of the 'wretched Finder' (91) of the bracelet with the magnanimous admission that he hates him 'So much that I almost pity thy estate' (92). Having thus dispensed with any residual pleasantries, the speaker can devote himself to the satisfying business of venting his injured spleen by wishing upon the thief all the bodily tortures he can imagine; the more inventive and fantastic they are, the more mollified he will be. Accordingly, the concluding sestet of his curse builds on the individual elements of 'All mischiefs which all devills ever thought' (106), 'poore and gouty age,' and 'The plagues of travellers, love and marriage' (107-8) to his wittily-expressed desire that 'at thy lifes latest moment / May thy swolne sins themselves to thee present' (109-10). Donne is wonderfully disingenuous here, for the vehemence of the curse cannot entirely mask the speaker's enjoyment of the curse for its own sake. He is, it seems, getting as much pleasure from the idea of the curse and its intellectual composition as he is from any imagined future visitation of the curse upon the thief. This is not outright flippancy, but we should not assume that the speaker is completely serious.

Another fundamental, and perhaps more unsettling, feature of Donne's interpretation of secular love in the *Elegies* is the misogyny in many of the poems.²⁵ Importantly, we need to realise that 'It is unfair to Donne's poetry, and inconsistent, to treat the misogynous, cynical poems as rhetorical posturing or as exercises in witty manipulation of literary convention (hence, not "really meant")' (Mousley 27).²⁶ Beneath the hyperactive wit lies a

²⁵ See for example, Achsah Guibbory's essay, "'Oh, let me not serve so': the Politics of Love in Donne's *Elegies*" in Andrew Mousley, *John Donne*. (25-44), for one explanation of Donne's misogyny as being closely connected with the political and social climate of late Elizabethan England.

²⁶ However, at least two critics acquit Donne of the charge of misogyny. Diana Treviño Benet writes: "The *Elegies* are not bizarre misogynistic love poems. Most of them are less interested in the inner world of emotion than in the outer world of social interactions impinging upon any relationship they might sketch', with 'Donne being more inclined to explore sexual transgression than to pass any particular judgement on it' (15). M. L. Stapleton goes so far as

sincere, or at least a not lightly-held conviction that has implications for the presentation of love in the *Elegies*, and specifically affects (in conjunction with Donne's Ovidian game-playing and subversive unseriousness), the way in which he uses sacred imagery.

While misogyny in the *Elegies* is not confined to 'The Comparison', it does use sacred imagery (albeit briefly) as part of its 'extravagant evocation of female ugliness' (Warnke 30). As Gardner puts it, 'It ingeniously blends in one poem the Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan tradition in Italian poetry' (1965 119) to produce a parodic catalogue of a rival's mistress's deformities. John Carey notes that 'Like the aesthetes, [Donne] cultivated the art of vivid sensation, and enjoyed outraging the narrow-minded. "The Comparison" shows both tendencies, as do poems like "The Indifferent" and "Love's Usury", which favour sexual promiscuity' (180), with the extreme nature of its parody prompting some critics to write off 'The Comparison' as a 'bawdy trifle' (Carey 141). One of the outraged and narrow-minded, Wilbur Sanders remarks, for example, that Donne seems to 'desire nothing more than to shock and then to snigger' (40). I disagree with Sander's low opinion of Donne's poetic aim, for there is more than simple points-scoring to the similes of breasts 'like worme eaten trunkes, cloth'd in seals skin' (25) and skin 'Like rough bark'd elmboughes, or the russet skin / Of men late scurg'd for madnes, or for sinne, / Like Sun-parch'd quarters on the citie gate' (29-31). The further on in the poem we go, the stronger the speaker's disgust as, in the blazon tradition, he moves further down the woman's body. His description of the other mistress's genitalia is savagely brutal, and there is no hint of love or affection in his enquiring of their sex life, 'Is not your last act harsh, and violent, / As when a Plough a stony ground doth rent?' (47-8). Yet it is at this point that Donne suddenly, and startlingly, moves back to the speaker and his mistress with the eucharistic assertion that

to state that it is Donne's speaker, not Donne, who hates women, asserting that 'Some critics conflate Donne with his speaker and thereby mistakenly attribute the creation's antifeminism to his creator' (21 note 18).

So kisse good Turtles, so devoutly nice
 Are Priests in handling reverent sacrifice,
 And such in searching wounds the Surgeon is
 As wee, when we embrace, or touch, or kisse. (49-52)

Coming immediately after similes of war and destruction, the identification of the lovers with ordained priests and consecrated sacrifices and then a surgeon and his blunt-ended probe is not quite the confirmation of true love it seems. We have no way of knowing how much of the religious simile is spoken with a straight face, and how much of it is the speaker's need, using exaggeration, to insist that he and his mistress are a better couple than the 'odious' ex-mistress and her lover;²⁷ it could simply be a defence mechanism. Whatever else it is, Donne's juxtaposition of the profane and the sacred here is not necessarily the definitive evidence of love – true or otherwise – that the speaker would like it to be.

In '[Recusancy]' Donne makes greater use of sacred imagery as part of the speaker's defiance of his mistress's unfaithfulness. He begins by seeking to distance himself from any association with those whose actions, he believes, make them self-serving hypocrites:

Oh, let mee not serve so, as those men serve
 Whom honours smoakes at once fatten and sterve;
 Poorely enrich't with great mens words or lookes;
 Nor so write my name in thy loving bookes
 As those Idolatrous flatterers, which still
 Their Princes stiles, with many Realmes fulfil
 Whence they no tribute have, and where no sway. (1-7)

The princes of the realm, 'those Idolatrous flatterers' who falsely claim sovereignty over that which they do not rule, are not exempt from the speaker's derision, nor those who court 'great mens wordes or lookes' for financial and social gain. Donne wants to be able to write his name in his

²⁷ Compare the speaker's elevation of himself and his mistress above the other couple with lines 39-43 of 'To his Mistris Going to Bed', where the separation of the elite from the laity is presented without the maliciousness in 'The Comparison'.

mistress's 'loving bookes' – her 'register of lovers' (Gardner 1965 125), honestly and without undue favour. And yet the mere presence of the plural 'bookes', especially as it refers to the mistress's register of lovers, is not entirely unconnected to her probable plurality of affection at any one time. The speaker himself is quickly made aware of this, as he admits:

When my Soule was in her owne body sheath'd,
Nor yet by oathes betroth'd, nor kisses breath'd
Into my Purgatory, faithlesse thee,
Thy heart seem'd waxe, and steele thy constancie. (11-4)

He then continues scornfully to lament the woman's unfaithfulness in the long conceit of the river changing its course (lines 15-34).

It is when Donne returns to describing his rejection of his mistress and her faithlessness in religious language, and his joking about excommunication, that we are aware of just how bold this religious language is. He declares:

Though hope bred faith and love; thus taught, I shall
As nations do from Rome, from thy love fall.
My hate shall outgrow thine, and utterly
I will renounce thy dalliance: and when I
Am the Recusant, in that resolute state,
What hurts it mee to be'excommunicate? (41-6)²⁸

Here the usual, negative associations of recusancy and excommunication as consequences of unorthodoxy are reversed so that they become proof of the speaker's strong faith in 'renounc[ing] thy dalliance'. The inference is that he has removed himself and his faith, hope and love from the corruption of the woman's (catholic) love to the other side of the theological fence, and taken to practising love as a protestant. Donne has, I think, by inverting the common seventeenth-century definition of a recusant, as 'a papist who refused to attend his parish church' (Gardner 126), placed the speaker in a

²⁸ See *Satyre III* for an example of Donne's satirical treatment of religion.

paradoxical position of moral righteousness and social freedom – and not the perhaps expected one of religious and amatory disobedience. In renouncing his faithless mistress the speaker is released from any compunction to observe a morally hollow profession of faith. Additionally, his recusancy leaves him free from any social censure (as a cuckold) occasioned by his false mistress's behaviour.

'Change' takes this notion of changeability and makes it into a veritable article of faith. In a poem such as this 'in praise of variety and inconstancy' (Warnke 30), Donne's ironic use of religious language acts in uneasy counterpoint to the profane reality described by the speaker. His unequivocal language in the first six lines makes this clear:

Although thy hand and faith, and good workes too,
Have seal'd thy love which nothing should undoe,
Yea though thou fall backe, that apostasie
Confirme thy love; yet much, much I feare thee.
Women are like the Arts, forc'd unto none,
Open to'all searchers, unpriz'd, if unknowne. (1-6)

His mistress's 'faith, and good workes' seem to be of the Catholic variety, since the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide* does not recognise good works as proof of justification. Significantly, as Carey puts it, these 'good workes' are sexual, and her 'faith' secular (38). In the continuing conflation of the secular and the profane, her 'apostasie' (which can be defined both as a renunciation of faith and an abandonment of principle), refers punningly to her 'falling backe' on a bed. Ambiguously, its sense here may also be understood to mean that the woman is 'confirming her love by apostatising from virtue; or it may be taken that in giving herself to him she apostatises from an earlier lover. Or, possibly, the jest is since nobody can apostatise who has not believed "falling back" is a proof of having loved' (Gardner 1965 136). Whichever definition of 'apostasie' we accept we are left with a dichotomy between what the love is and how it is described.

This dichotomy is even more disconcerting when we compare the similarities between lines 5-6 in the elegy and the final couplet of the 'Holy Sonnet: Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so bright and cleare'. The description in the 'Holy Sonnet' of the true Church as being 'most trew, and pleasing. . . / When she's embrac'd and open to most men' (13-14) bears more than a passing resemblance to the secular simile in 'Change': 'Women are like the Arts; forc'd unto none, / Open to'all searchers, unpriz'd, if unknowne'. Although the latter is part of a less-than-serious exposition of female inconstancy, the combination of the religious language in the previous four lines and the cynical proclamation of women's general promiscuity in the last two still manages to produce a sense of discomfort not entirely dissimilar to that felt by some readers at the way in which Donne applies the marriage metaphor to the universal church in 'Show me deare Christ'. As far as the speaker in 'Change' is concerned, women are as various as the arts, as easily sought, and relatively worthless if they are not diligently refined and worked at to give up their knowledge. Consequentially, in the first sestet of 'Change', the religious metaphors only heighten the incongruity of a woman whose 'hand and faith and good workes' have sealed her love, and yet is a woman amongst women to whom all 'searchers' have access, and whose worth is measured by the resulting knowledge.

The situation in 'To his Mistris Going to Bed' is a quite different one of joyful, energetic physicality, and lustful impatience, with flashes of religious language throughout the poem. For example, the speaker imperiously commands his mistress 'Off with those shoes: and then safely tread / In this loves hallow'd temple, this soft bed' (17-8). Donne conflates the secular and the sacred in such a way that the bed becomes 'a carnal temple of love, a mischievous and sensual combination of Eastern religious metaphor and carnal pun. Linking the Eastern temple with the bed ironically and exotically spiritualizes love; earthly terminology leads to an additional tonality of ecstatic but playful sexual enjoyment' (Sprenuwenberg-Stewart 52). In his metaphor of the bed as 'loves hallow'd temple' Donne also recalls the

speaker's words in 'The Sunne Rising': 'This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere (29-30). A few lines further on, the speaker distinguishes between an ethereal and a temporal angel thus:

though
 Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know
 By this these Angels from an evill sprite:
 They set our haire, but these the flesh upright. (21-4)

Neither his mistress, nor his apostrophising of her in her 'white robes' as one of 'heavens Angels' (19) will stand up to prolonged scrutiny, for she is far too earth-bound (not to mention the cause of his erection), and he too intent on achieving physical gratification to spend much time on spiritual contemplation at this point.

It is only later, in the third section, that the speaker makes greater use of religious language in his quest to persuade and satisfy, as it were. As an apologist for nakedness – 'Full nakedness, all joyes are due to thee' (33) – he begins his argument with the proposition, 'As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must bee / To taste whole joyes' (34-5). Frank Warnke comments how in this section Donne

continues the praise of eroticism, effecting at the same time a striking and altogether typical fusion of that eroticism with religious experience – more specifically, the experience of the religious mystic, who must undergo the loss of the body in order to be able to be vouchsafed the beatific vision, the direct beholding of God. Here, the undressing of the mistress corresponds to the loss of the body, while the vision of her naked body corresponds to the vision of the Deity. (64)

Further on in the section the speaker moves from images of 'unbodied' souls to the simile of his mistress as a sacred book. He argues passionately through the simile for the legitimate separation of the woman and her clothes, since

Like pictures, or like bookes gay coverings made
 For laymen, are all women thus arraid;
 Themselves are mystique bookes, which only wee
 Whom their imputed grace will dignify
 Must see reveal'd. Then since I may knowe,
 As liberally as to a midwife showe
 Thy selfe; cast all, yea this white linnen hence.
 Here is no pennance, much lesse innocence. (39-46)

These lines imply that the speaker is initiated into the sacred mystery of which this particular woman is the manifestation; if you will, he is one of the clergy able to read the Latin version of the sacred text, without needing a vernacular translation. Helen Gardner helpfully remarks of lines 39-40: 'There is a glance here at the view commonly ascribed to Papists that images are "ley-menes bokes". . .as well as the ignorant rich man who values his books for the bindings' (1965 132). Unlike either of these two instances of ignorance, however, the speaker is far more interested in what lies under the 'gay coverings' to be long distracted by externals.

To take Donne's blurring of the sacred and profane still further, a dense interplay of the two occurs. Behind Donne's use of 'imputed grace' (42) is the 'Protestant belief that it was Christ's imputed grace (that is, Christ's righteousness transferred to man) which made salvation for humankind possible' (Carey 106). Almost immediately, however, this 'theological nicety' (Carey 106) is subsumed back into what is, after all, a bawdy poem, with the speaker's imperative, 'Then since I may knowe, / As liberally as to a midwife showe / Thy selfe' (43-5). As Kerrigan notes, '[I]t is unlikely that Donne has in mind a gynaecological examination' (1987 5) in these lines, and what seems to be his initially abrupt switch from images of women's supposed sanctity to the openness of childbirth can seem less so if we connect them in the following way. The mistress has given the speaker the faith to see her naked body through her selectively-given gift of imputed grace. This knowledge of his mistress as 'mystique' book, however sanctified it appears through association, is also leading (the speaker hopes) to his having carnal knowledge of his mistress. He argues, ultimately, that just as a

woman in childbed must be unashamed of her body before a midwife, so his mistress should stop playing upon her mysteriousness and divest herself of her 'gay coverings'. Only when she is completely naked (so the speaker's logic goes), will she be able paradoxically to prove her ascribed sanctity to him; he demands to 'knowe' (43) her in all senses of the word.

Donne's use of sacred imagery in the *Elegies* is confined largely to 'Change', 'To his Mistris Going to Bed', 'Constancy' and '[Recusancy]' by the nature of the earthly love he is writing about. In many of the *Elegies* such love can be broadly characterised by its playfulness, its sense of unseriousness, wit, and sometimes, its bawdiness and denigration of women. This is not the kind of love that promotes a generosity of spirit in lovers, or a sense of equality and mutual liking to accompany lust, so that, more often than not, when Donne does juxtapose the profane and the religious in the *Elegies*, a situation is produced whereby the sacred functions as implicit criticism of the lovers' faithlessness to each other. This deliberate slippage between what is sacred and secular serves to undermine, however subtly, the kind of love being presented. Occasionally, there is not such an obvious tension between a speaker's serious trifling and his fear of betrayal, or disgust at a woman's behaviour. Instead, the sensual wittiness is complemented, rather than opposed, by the introduction of sacred imagery. Essentially, however, in the *Elegies* there always remains a disparity between the reality of earthly love in a particular elegy, and Donne's use of religious language.

Chapter 4: the *Songs and Sonets*

While the *Songs and Sonets*²⁹ share with the *Elegies* much of Donne's famous wit, his presentation of love in the sequence of more than fifty lyrics is not simply an expansion of that definition of love found in the *Elegies*.³⁰ As a generalisation, there is a discrete group within the sequence displaying less of the cynicism and fear about infidelity that seems to so preoccupy Donne the elegist. Some of the poems share some common factors with the *Elegies*, but there are also others, like 'Aire and Angels', or 'The Canonization', in which the love is more serious in tone. The absence of a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane in love, which has already been seen in a few of the *Elegies*, here becomes more prominent through Donne's increased use of sacred language and imagery to describe and analyse his love. Consequently, in a significant number of poems there is 'a deep sense of the holiness of erotic love' and the 'sacredness of sex' (Guibbory 16).

'The Indifferent', 'The Apparition' and 'The Dreame' are, however, the three *Songs and Sonets* that have the most in common with the *Elegies* in their dismissal of faithful, monogamous love. Like 'Elegy III: Change', 'The Indifferent' praises the virtue of inconstancy. At the heart of the speaker's argument for inconstancy is his assertion that 'I can love any, so she be not true' (9). Importantly, he balances this statement with equal scorn at the idea of men's constancy – 'Or doth a feare, that men are true, torment you?' (13) – and immediately, artfully, moves to assure his audience of the truth: 'Oh we are not, be not you so, / Let mee and doe you, twenty know' (14-15). As far as the speaker is concerned, 'Loves sweetest Part' is said to be 'Variety' (20). Furthermore, the strong sense of his 'ebullient self-sufficiency' (Smith 1964 48) is directly related to the triumph of inconstancy in love as orthodox

²⁹ All quotations from and references to the *Songs and Sonets* are from Helen Gardner's 1965 Clarendon edition, and referenced by line number in the text, unless otherwise stated.

³⁰ While seven of the *Elegies* can reasonably be dated, on manuscript evidence, before 1599 (Carey 104), I am in no way suggesting that this implies a chronological progression in Donne's development of love in the *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonets*, were such a thing provable.

belief. Deviations from that are considered heretical, not to mention naïve, by the speaker, and his divine ally, Venus, who functions here not just as the goddess of love, but as the goddess of inconstancy, pronouncing on matters of doctrine for her worshippers. There is also something of the Grand Inquisitor about her, as she goes, examines and returns 'ere long' (22) with her judgement that,

alas, Some two or three
Poore Heretiques in love there bee,
Which thinke to stablish dangerous constancie.
But I have told them, since you will be true,
You shall be true to them, who'are false to you. (23-7)

The religious terminology used here, of heretics, and catechising, only serves to heighten the irony as to the type of love considered acceptable. Venus's condemnation of fidelity is the paradox that allows the speaker to be self-sufficient, and indeed secure, in his inconstancy. His self-sufficiency rests in not being committed to, or having to rely on, any one woman for love and support (since she is likewise inconstant), and his security is strengthened by his knowledge that 'dangerous constancie' has been declared the preserve of 'Some two or three / Poore Heretiques'. But more than anything else, the speaker's 'tendentious and self-serving (but rhetorically dazzling) argument' (Machacek 193) is rendered tenuous by his reliance on the very tenet of faith (chronic infidelity) that will prove least stable. No amount of dressing his protestations up in the language of grand religious conviction can evade the actuality of the love he espouses.

While 'The Apparition' and 'The Dreame' diverge from 'The Indifferent' in their treatment of love – neither of them celebrates infidelity – they share with the latter a twisting manipulation of religious language; in the case of 'The Apparition' it is almost savage at times. What becomes apparent in this poem of lost love and hurt pride is that the title's positive 'theological implications of a manifestation, an epiphany, an advent' (Patrides 43, headnote) – with a possible oblique reference to the

Annunciation – are instantly extinguished by the speaker's venom towards his ex-mistress, evident from the first line, and continued throughout. He calls her a 'murdresse' (1) and a 'fain'd vestall' (5), and goes on to mock her new lover's sexual ardour (7-10). The speaker's threat that his ghost will visit her when 'thou thinkst thee free / From all solicitation from mee' (2-3) is another indication of how far the poem has come from the title's positive implications. By the close of 'The Apparition' whatever faint echoes of the Annunciation were audible in the poem's title have been drowned out by the speaker's unrelentingly harsh words towards his ex-mistress. If his ghost appears, it will not be as an angel of mercy bringing a message of redemption. Neither is there any vestige of the Virgin Mary in the woman to whom the ghost will appear; the apparition of the title has shown itself to be a vision of bitterness and revenge.

By contrast, in 'The Dreame' the speaker's manipulation of religious language is altogether more overt and positive, while yet remaining focussed on secular ends. The speaker begins by telling his 'Dearest love' that 'for nothing lesse then thee / Would I have broke this happy dreame' (1-2), but then almost immediately goes on to say,

thou wakd'st me wisely; yet
My Dreame thou brok'st not, but continued'st it,
Thou are so true, that thoughts of thee suffice,
To make dreames truth; and fables histories. (5-8)

In hope of concluding his interrupted dream to his satisfaction the speaker then imperatively says 'Enter these armes, for since thou thoughtst it best, / Not to dreame all my dreame, lets do the rest' (9-10).

Yet he is obviously not obeyed, for the poem continues for another twenty lines, a performance in deliberate slippage between the sacred and the profane. The speaker, having been unsuccessful in his plain-speaking, changes his tone to one of flattery with religious underpinnings. He calls her 'an Angell' (14) but his perception of her changes in the next line:

But when I saw thou saw'st my heart,
 And knew'st my thoughts, beyond an Angels art,
 When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st when
 Excesse of joy would wake me, and cam'st then,
 I doe confesse, it could not chuse but bee,
 Prophane, to thinke thee anything but thee. (15-20)

In likening her to an angel the lover raises her beyond an earthly woman, implying that she has some divine knowledge of him, but then surpasses this when he says she 'knew'st my thoughts beyond an Angels art'; what ensues is a situation of finely-balanced, exquisite confusion for both speaker and reader. The cause of this intentional confusion – that with her 'intuition of the speaker's mind she [the mistress] is more than an angel with implicitly divine knowledge' (Young 264) – can be partly explained by reference to glosses of line 16, which stress that it is God alone who can know the thoughts of a person's heart.³¹ It seems that the speaker is thus placing the mistress in some kind of limbo, seeing her as neither mortal nor an angel, and yet stopping short of openly daring to compare her to God. Although the speaker's insistence here on the mistress' purportedly sacred qualities is at the forefront of his argument, his sexual quibbles on the verbs 'staying' (21) and 'rising' (22) are still very much part of the argument. Just as his love is 'not all spirit' (25) in either its expression or intention, neither is his mistress all angel, without a physical, sexual side to her: what is at work here is 'a seducer's paradox that argues for the identification of purity and spirituality with physical consummation' (Young 264-5), for entirely secular, sexual ends.

In 'Loves Deitie', however, any chance of secular love retaining some purity is again subordinated to the speaker's preoccupation with the unrequited nature of his love. He laments, 'I must love her, that loves not mee' (7). What distinguishes this complaint of amatory ill-use is the part

³¹ Two examples are those provided by Gardner and Patrides, who say respectively that 'Only God can know the thoughts of the heart' (211) and 'Ones thoughts are hidden from Angels, and known solely to God' (34).

played by the 'god of Love' (2) in all the machinations and changes of mind that the speaker goes through. His chief grievance is that this god of love has 'produc'd a destinie' (5), strengthened by 'that vice-nature, custome' (6), which sees him loving unrequitedly. He accuses the overweening but ineffectual god of lazy indulgence in his joining in love of male and female, since he is not concerned with the joining of souls (Gardner 170), but rather 'His office was indulgently to fit / Actives to passives' (11-12). Dejectedly, the speaker declares 'It cannot bee / Love, till I love her, that loves mee' (13-14).

But, perhaps not surprisingly, this avowal of true love is not the end of things for either the speaker or the god whom he nominally worships. The speaker's attitude towards the god is closely tied up with his fortunes (or otherwise) in love. He speaks of 'they which made him god' (8) in the third-person-plural, past tense, which acts as a distancing technique to separate and remove him from those who created the god, and the deity whom he later accuses of 'Tyrannie' (19) – that 'All is the purlewe of the God of Love' (18). His condemnation of the god's laxness (in love) and greediness is thus connected to his vacillation over love. Just as he has little fear of or respect for the god of love, so too he ultimately places little value in constancy. In the fourth stanza this is apparent in his styling himself 'Rebell and Atheist too' and asking 'why murmure I, / As though I felt the worst that love could doe?' (22-3). His querulousness continues, to culminate in

Love might make me leave loving, or might trie
A deeper plague, to make her love mee too,
Which, since she loves before, I'am loth to see;
Falshood is worse then hate; and that must bee
If shee whom I love, should love mee'. (24-8)

This attempt to occupy the moral high ground and gloss over contradictions³² results, as Redpath notes, in '[t]he poet now say[ing] he

³² His contradiction arises out of his earlier statement that 'It cannot bee / Love, till I love her, that loves mee' (13-4), which he has now turned on its head.

wants to love and not to be loved in return. Yet Donne is not reconciled to the ways of the God of Love; and in this respect he is as rebellious as ever' (271).

The defiance in 'Loves Exchange' is of a different kind from that found in 'Loves Deitie', for secular, personified Love in the latter wields a great deal more real power than its counterpart in the previous poem. This does not make the relationship between the speaker and Love any less acrimonious though, for the speaker's invective against Love begins in the first two lines, when he moans that 'any devill else but you, / Would for a given Soule give something too' (1-2). He then roams through Presence Chamber, courtroom, and siege plain in a bid to emphasise the distinction that exists between those who are rewarded for their efforts, and himself, whose plight he sees as serious:

Love, let me never know that this
Is love, or, that love childish is.
Let me not know that others know
That she knowes my paine, least that so
A tender shame make me mine owne new woe. (17-21)

This touching picture of self-effacement does not remain unchanged for long, as he follows this up in the next stanza with 'If thou give nothing, yet thou'art just, / Because I would not thy first motions trust' (22-3). Not content with questioning Love's supposedly infallible judgement in this way, at the end of this stanza he admits that he has forfeited his right to plead for grace, 'Having put Love at last to shew this face' (28). What is striking about the power ascribed to Love's face is that such a degree of absolute power is given to Love, and not to an individual mistress. The deity is the one with the ability to 'command / And change th'Idolatrie of any land' (29-30), who

Can call vow'd men from cloisters, dead from tombes,
And melt both Poles at once, and store
Deserts with cities, and make more
Mynes in the earth, then Quarries were before. (32-5)

This meditation on Love's almost overpowering might is shattered by the speaker's next words, acknowledging his delicate situation, and confirming his defiance. His dissatisfaction with Love's treatment of him prompts his outburst that

If I must example bee
To future Rebels; If th'unborne
Must learne, by my being cut up, and torne:
Kill, and dissect me, Love; for this
Torture against thine owne end is,
Rack't carcasses make ill Anatomies. (37-42)

The enormity of this repudiation of Love's power – that Love can be challenged at his own game – is perhaps best demonstrated by comparing it to the wishes expressed by the speaker in 'The Relique'. Against the obstreperousness in 'Loves Exchange' of the speaker's taunting of Love is placed the miraculous harmony, in 'The Relique', of the remains of the lovers – their bones and hair, which will be declared relics by a future bishop and king (15-6). The speakers in both poems look to future generations but differ markedly in the imagined consequences of their present actions: one will serve as an example to future rebellious lovers and foster ignorance of all love; the other will inspire devotion towards and knowledge of true love.

Donne's penchant for love as a synonym for destruction continues, and if anything, is exacerbated in 'Twicknam Garden', where the juxtaposition between overt religious language and secular circumstance is perhaps the most explicit, so far, of the poems discussed. What shapes 'Twicknam Garden' most strongly is the speaker, who 'emerges as no ordinary loser in the game of courtly love but as a self-professed self-deceiver who suffers self-inflicted misery. A master of irreverence and irony, he purposefully exaggerates his plight as miserable lover frankly desiring the affections of the wrong woman' (Shepppard 65). From the start, the speaker attempts to arouse sympathy by describing himself as 'Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with teares' (1): the very picture of dejection. Only a few

lines later, in the hope of heightening the pathos and further emphasising his plight he changes metaphor from the meteorological to the sacred, accusing himself thus: 'But O, selfe traytor, I do bring / The spider love, which transubstantiates all, / And can convert Manna to gall' (5-7). Sallye Sheppard comments insightfully on the significance of such undeniably religious language:

Donne projects the speaker's motive through ironic treatment of an orthodox religious image: the Roman Eucharist and its power of transubstantiation. Just as the substance of the Eucharist becomes the true presence of Christ, so the physical union of soul companions becomes the essence of love. Such love is a miracle. But Donne's speaker intends no such miracle, and Donne's Eucharistic inversion, whereby manna become gall, emphasizes the destructive potential of the speaker's "spider love" – his envy and his unfulfilled desire. (67)

So the reality, as the speaker well knows, is very different. The 'serpent' of line 9 is not the embodiment of forbidden knowledge held out to the ignorant, as the speaker would have us believe, but is rather the manifestation of already-acquired truth. Just as the serpent in the Garden of Eden dissembled, so too does the speaker conceal his acting behind an assumed attitude of righteous self-pity – he wants us to think that this garden is a 'True Paradise' (9) of innocent and justified despair. Equally disingenuous is his wish for Love to let him be 'some senslesse peece of this place' (16), or, even better, to be turned into a 'stone fountaine weeping out my yeare' (18). The latter he envisages as a place where

Hither with christall vyals, lovers come,
And take my teares, which are loves wine,
And try your mistresse Teares at home,
For all are false, that tast not just like mine. (19-22)

This home-test kit for female infidelity contains, however, a paradox. Like his counterpart in 'Loves Exchange', the lovelorn man in 'Twicknam Garden'

wants to taint and destroy what he cannot have, which in this case is a woman faithful to another. His tears, which he consecrates as 'loves wine', sacrificial though he may consider them, are but empty signs of an abused sacrament. He also distorts his last generalisation to favour himself by slandering the woman's faithfulness to another man – 'her truth kills mee' (27). It is not her constancy that is the evil in this matter, but his willing self-deception about the nature of his love, which is made even more pernicious by his use of sacred language in an attempt to make it seem other than it really is.

'Negative Love', on the other hand (in a way that is more fully developed in 'A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day'), strips love down to an essence of nothing,³³ without the cynicism inherent in some of the other *Songs and Sonets*; it 'turns on the notion of the impossibility of knowing or defining love perfectly' (Zickler 28). It is not that the love expressed in the poem is necessarily either sacred or divine: it is simply better than other love. The speaker explains it thus: 'If that be simply perfectest / Which can by no way be exprest / But *Negatives*, my love is so' (10-2). Rather than weighing down his definition of love with hyperbole (and running the risk of seeming insincere), he chooses to see his love as being 'absolutely simple and perfect', and therefore unable to 'be defined in terms of what it is not' (Gardner 178). Such seeming certainty – 'To All, which all love, I say no' (13) – does not prevent the speaker from adjuring 'any who deciphers best' (14) to 'teach mee that nothing' (16), so that he can know without question the true nature of love. As Carey puts it: 'Once he has put it into words, we recognize "Negative Love" as our own love. What we love in a loved person, and why, are irretrievably beyond knowing – though love itself feels so natural that we get used to assuming it must be explicable somehow' (126). Tantalisingly close to pure love though we may fancy ourselves to be with 'Negative

³³ Redpath (146) suggests two alternative titles for this poem: 'Negative Love' or 'The Nothing'.

Love', we are still confronted with hurdles and, because of ignorance, uncertainty.

In the 'Song (Sweetest love, I do not goe)', as with 'Loves Infinitenesse', the speaker does not attempt to make his love sacred, but is instead concentrating on making it eternal; something of a problem, since he freely acknowledges 'that I / Must dye at last' (5-6). His solution to this dilemma centres on the common idea that he considers himself literally and metaphorically part of his beloved, and she of him. This is not, however, quite the straightforward proposition that it appears.³⁴ He says 'When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not winde, / But sigh'st my soule away' (25-6), and then four lines later on asserts that she cannot love him, 'as thou say'st, / If in thine my life thou waste, / Thou art the best of mee' (30-2). At the last he urges her, despite her fears of line 36, to

But thinke that wee
Are but turn'd aside to sleepe;
They who one another keepe
Alive, ne'r parted bee. (38-41)

This is all very well in theory, but what if we try literally to follow this exhortation, as the speaker urges? Since the idea embodied here is that of every sigh and tear shortening one's life a little (Patrides 15), the lovers must refrain from these things in order to keep each other alive, and prove this recipe for eternity correct. Although the speaker only refers to sex implicitly, there is, nonetheless, the sense that if his parting from the woman is not permanent, then sex could be high on his list of priorities when he returns. Therefore the shortening of life through the shedding of tears and sighs was also applicable to male orgasm, with ejaculation resulting in the loss of a few moments of one's life. Paradoxically, the lovers must behave sexually, and

³⁴ While I don't disagree with Redpath (258) that, 'as in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", there is a confident and comforting belief in love's survival of the physical separation of the lovers', I think his comment that 'Indeed, here the poet goes further, and hyperbolically denies that the lovers will really be "parted" at all' is closer to the real state of things in 'Song (Sweetest love)'. The speaker's very need for hyperbole diminishes the strength of the last four lines.

emotionally, as if dead towards each other in order to keep themselves and each other alive, and preserve the illusion of eternal togetherness.

The speaker in 'Loves Infinitenesse' goes about trying to secure eternal love, at least initially, in an altogether more businesslike way, as a man of the world. While Donne's use of 'Infinitenesse' in the title is connotative of endlessness, of boundlessness,³⁵ and as such expresses a cliché, the body of this poem undermines this assertion with a conditional 'if', from, 'If yet I have not all your love' (1), to 'If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it' (28). In his comment, 'Deare, I shall never have Thee All' (11), the speaker very quickly realises that there is a great danger that he will never, for a myriad of reasons, have all the woman's love. Not only is there the risk that her love is 'partiall' (9), not confined to the speaker, so 'That some to mee, some should to others fall' (10), but that in her heart 'there be or shall, / New love created bee, by other men' (14-5). He cannot even begin to think about making his love sacred, for he is too busy merely trying to make it his own, in competition with those, in the language of the marketplace, who 'can in teares, / In sighs, in oathes, and letters outbid mee' (16-7). In order to make the scope of his love infinite, but the object finite, he comes up with a 'liberall' solution to this problem: 'Loves riddles are, that though thy heart depart, / It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it' (29-30). These lines are part of the last stanza, in which, as Warnke observes, Donne

effects a brilliant reversal, abandoning the language of commerce and replacing it with the language of religious experience. The great paradox central to Christianity and the other great religions – that one gains one's life by losing it – supplies the model by which the lover understands the nature of his own desire. This is not to say that the poem is a religious allegory or that it is an attempted elevation of amorous love to the status of the divine: it is rather that a part of the poem's

³⁵ However, Joseph Grennan suggests another definition of infinite, as 'rather that which is imperfect, incomplete, related to perfection and wholeness only as part is related to whole, and is something like matter deprived of form' (134).

meaning is recognition of the basis shared by all transcendent desire. (43)

At the finish the speaker finally proposes 'But wee will have a way more liberall, / Then changing hearts, to joyne them, so wee shall / Be one, and one anothers All' (31-3); even this insurance against wandering, commonly available love is not absolutely guaranteed.

By comparison, while the speakers in 'The Sunne Rising' and 'The Good-morrow' remain exclusively interested in the pleasures of earthly love, the two lyrics differ from the previous poems in that they both contain exalted and idealistic expressions of a constant love. 'The Sunne Rising' is the more immediate and dramatic of the two, beginning as it does, 'Busie old foole, unruly Sunne, / Why dost thou thus, / Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?' (1-3); but the 'The Good-morrow' is no less convincing, for all its relative restraint and measured tone. In 'The Good-morrow', which shares with 'The Sunne Rising' the idea of the two lovers needing no other and disdaining the outside world, the 'one little roome, an every where' of line 11 is found only in themselves – 'Let us possesse our world, each hath one, and is one' (14). Integral to the wholeness of this world is that 'It is a *spiritual* love that the lovers have found – but spirit cannot be severed from flesh' (Warnke 33). While the speaker may initially dismiss his experiences of love prior to meeting his mistress, saying, 'I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I / Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then? / But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?' (1-3), he finally realises that 'If ever any beauty I did see, / Which I desir'd, and got, 'twas but a dreame of thee' (6-7). As in 'The Dreame', the waking reality will contain the essence of the 'dreame' and more: it will be a love encompassing body and soul. He declares at the last, 'What ever dyes, was not mixt equally, / If our two loves be one, or, thou and I / Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die' (19-21), relying, in his idealism, on his mistress being alike in her willingness and ability to prove her constancy.

In 'The Sunne Rising' the speaker is not at such pains to justify his love, but rather to get rid of the intruding sun, the 'Sawcy pedantique wretch' (5), so that he can go back to enjoying and exulting in his beloved. His dismissive derision of schoolboys, apprentices and the Court all stems from his belief that 'Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme, / Nor houres, dayes, months, which are the rags of time' (9-10). Yet as much as he tries to shut out the world, and pretend that he and his beloved are entire unto themselves, he continually predicates the eternity of their love on the world under heaven. He does not use explicitly religious language to strengthen his argument, preferring instead to say,

She's all States, and all Princes, I,
 Nothing else is.
 Princes doe but play us; compar'd to this,
 All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie. (21-4)

As his dénouement, the speaker opts for flattery of the sun, to whom in its personified state he continues his theme that 'the world's contracted thus' (26) into himself and his beloved. By appearing solicitous of the sun's advanced age he also hopes to prolong his lie-a-bed pleasures, cajolingly telling the sun, 'Shine here to us, and thou art every where; / This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere' (29-30). It is appropriate that 'The Sunne Rising' ends 'with a reference to the bed where human love, spiritual as well as physical, is consummated' (Warnke 36), for while the speaker has not used explicitly religious language to describe the nature of his love, he is nonetheless envisioning his contracted world containing both spiritual and physical love.

While Donne's depiction of the bed as a site of sexual and spiritual communion (and all which that implies) has been eminently acceptable in 'The Good-morrow' and 'The Sunne Rising', it proves (for some critics at

least),³⁶ to be decidedly less so in 'The Flea'. The discomfort felt by critics like Patrides and Quiller-Couch stems, I think, from the extreme nature of the juxtaposition that Donne is practising in 'The Flea'. Strong physical, sexual desire and frequent sacred terminology prove to be particularly intimate bedfellows in this poem, and when coupled with a flea as their intermediary, have caused nervousness in some quarters as to the propriety of their relations. This is the poem wherein the world of the lovers is contracted into a microcosm within the body of a flea and, according to DiPasquale, in which 'a sexual Eucharist is celebrated' (173). Although I disagree with her reading of the poem,³⁷ in 'The Flea' Donne does use, albeit in a less-than-conventional way, the four distinct parts to communion – the presentation of the elements, their consecration, fracturing (breaking), and distribution – to advance his argument for sexual consummation. He begins by presenting the flea to his mistress with 'Marke but this flea' (1). The second stage in the preparation for communion, the flea's consecration as the sacred vessel of the lovers' blood, is rather more drawn out, for it is not until the second stanza that Donne finally comes out with his assertion that 'This flea is you and I, and this / Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is' (12-3). Lustfully impatient for sexual satisfaction, he does not have to wait long for the destructive fracturing of the newly sanctified flea, with whose blood the mistress has 'Purpled' (20) her nail; however, Donne is not convinced that he will benefit from the flea's death. Inherent in the breaking of the consecrated Host is the paradox that communicants are made whole through Christ's sacrificial crucifixion, for which the Eucharist is a remembrance. Importantly, the

³⁶ To give but two examples of the disconcertion with which some critics regard 'The Flea', Arthur Quiller-Couch positively squirms when he says, 'I suppose [Donne's] poem "The Flea" to be about the most merely disgusting in our language' (131), while Patrides goes so far as to say that it is 'certainly erotic, possibly to the point of vulgarity' (xxxii).

³⁷ I do not agree with DiPasquale's reading of 'The Flea' and its subject as being more about the Catholic versus the Protestant celebration of the Eucharist than a seduction poem. As part of her argument that Donne's 'conception of poetry was influenced by his engagement in the theological debate over the sacraments' (1) she focusses on how Donne views the 'exchange between author and reader' (5), and when coupled with her foregrounding of the Catholic versus Protestant sacramental debate causes her, I believe, to stray too far from the poem itself. See Chapter Six, "'The Flea" as Profane Eucharist', in *Literature and Sacrament: the Sacred and the Secular in John Donne*.

'Purpled. . . naile' and 'blood of innocence' (20) momentarily foreground the Paschal Lamb's sacrifice, so that both Christ's supreme act of ultimate selflessness, which he alone could perform, and the prime sacrament and symbol of Christian community are interwoven. In so doing, Donne further reinforces the irony (as far as Donne, the flea, and the woman are concerned), that it is only in the distribution, and receiving of communion that one also receives the gift of Christ's redemptive love, and Donne cannot be certain, despite his reasoning in lines 25-7, that his mistress will agree to celebrate this 'sexual Eucharist'. Hence, he uses the flea as the crux of his argument, as a way, he hopes, of downplaying the magnitude of his partner's agreeing to sleep with him, while yet hoping his assumed nonchalance towards sex will persuade her of her selfishness in denying him: 'How little that which thou deny'st me is' (2). He next wittily asserts that the flea, having bitten both of them, therefore contains their mingled blood, 'And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee' (4), and that it would surely be no 'sinne, or shame, or losse of maidenhead' (6) for them to follow up its mingling of their blood by having sex; but whether he will be able to translate his words into actions is another matter entirely.

Throughout the poem love remains earth-bound in its object, the female beloved, but frequently sacred in its language. Thus, the speaker says,

This flea is you and I, and this
Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloystered in these living walls of Jet. (12-5)

He then goes on to condemn the killing of the flea as 'sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three' (18), since the flea also metaphorically contains the two lovers; however, it is difficult to take him completely seriously. This is not because the lover is faking his ardour, or because of his desire to get his beloved to commit sexually. Rather, if we define sacrilege as a violation or misuse of something that is regarded as sacred, we are meant to see the flea

as a sacred vessel because of what it contains: the actual blood and metaphorical presence of the lovers, and its killing as the act of sacrilege. He even goes so far as to describe the flea as symbolic first of the Trinity, with his plea 'Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare' (10), and then as a microcosmic representation of 'our marriage bed'. In one insect Donne combines both a fundamental Christian doctrine and the sacrament of marriage. It is also significant that

Yet, in a neat parallel, the flea's fragility is accentuated by its 'transformation. . . to a temple and a cloister' (Carey 147) and the accompanying sacred associations (not to mention its resulting martyrdom), just as the speaker's argument is made more, and not less, displeasing to his beloved by his trying to introduce elements of the divine. For all the emphasis that the speaker may place on the sanctity of the flea, it is easily and quickly destroyed, and with it goes also the visible sign of the lovers' relationship. The mistress' low opinion of Donne's efforts at making their love appear sacred are borne out by her not only refusing throughout the poem to give in to his pleadings, but also remaining ambivalent at the end. Despite his last brave assault on her sensibilities – 'Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee, / Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee' (26-7) – the speaker has no guarantee of future capitulation to which to look forward. His attempt at elevating the sensuously physical to the level of the sacramental ultimately results in a humorous situation, where the sanctification of secular love is brief, messy, and comical.

'The Anniversarie' has none of the alleged erotic 'vulgarity' of 'The Flea', but does share with it an almost overwhelming sense of lovers striving to make their love sacred within the bounds and constraints of their earthly existence. Donne tells us that it has been a year since 'thou and I first one another saw' (5), a year measured in the ageing of 'Kings, and all their favorites' (1). As a way of distinguishing himself from the implicit decay of the associated 'honors, beauties, wits' (2) the speaker describes his love as endless, and rarer than the usual variety:

All other things, to their destruction draw,
 Only our love hath no decay;
 This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
 Running it never runs from us away,
 But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day. (6-10)

This idea, that 'love hath no decay' is in itself nothing new, but there are interesting resonances in Donne's language here both of the Book of Common Prayer, with its 'As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end', and the threefold recalling of the first day as the day of Creation, the 'last day' as spoken of by St. John (John 6:54), and the everlasting life to be enjoyed by those believers in heaven with Christ. Although the lovers may initially have spoken of their love in the language of passing days, it is precisely this kind of eternity that they want for their love, a fact underlined by the speaker's use of language with religious, sacred connotations.

Yet in the next stanza we are quickly reminded that, despite the earlier words, the couple's love is still temporal:

Alas, as well as other Princes, wee,
 (Who Prince enough in one another bee,)
 Must leave at last in death, these eyes, and eares,
 Oft fed with true oathes, and with sweet salt teares. (13-6)

They are not superior to princes, and just as the latter will lose in death their power, wealth and status, so too will the lovers lose their wealth of tears, oaths and looks, 'When bodies to their graves, soules from their graves remove' (20). In death, too, because they are lover and mistress, they cannot share the same grave,³⁸ so that they see themselves as divorced in body and spirit (11-2). This has the effect of colouring their perception of Heaven, for while the lovers do not doubt they are going there, they do consider that they will receive no special treatment or recognition because of their love. Having

³⁸ See Gardner 1965 (xxix and 199) for an explanation of this phenomenon.

decided that in Heaven 'wee shall be throughly blest, / But wee no more, then all the rest' (21-2) the speaker decides to chance his and his mistress's luck on earth, where 'Here upon earth, we're Kings, and none but wee / Can be such Kings, nor of such subjects bee' (23-4). What is interesting about this description of their love is that the speaker moves from calling himself and his mistress 'Princes' in the second stanza, to 'Kings' in the third. In some sense, as they move further up the hierarchy of Being – from princes to kings – they are trying to achieve a greater measure of sanctity. Since the lovers have decided that they are not going to be any more blessed in Heaven than on earth, their sanctity must, paradoxically, be got from earthly offices and titles; the belief of the divine right of kings was a powerful justification for a Renaissance monarch to rule as God's representative on earth, answerable to no one under Him. The lovers' subordinated fears are perceptively exposed by Carey, who says,

It is not happiness, but superiority that Donne craves, which is why he hustles the afterlife out of his poem, and returns to his royal pre-eminence ("Here upon earth we're Kings"). He knows that their reign will be only temporary: the time fuse, as the last line tells us, is already burning. But he clings to their earthly reign nevertheless. And that represents a major change of direction in the poem; for at the start it was their disembodied love, free of time, knowing no tomorrow, or yesterday, that Donne celebrated. Now it is their monarchy, celebrated in years. (111-2)

By implication, their 'monarchy, celebrated in years', must have a finite end: death.

There is none of this anxiety about death and separation in 'The Undertaking', for the speaker chooses instead to focus on containing his love, and ensuring its sanctity in the face of ignorant humanity, a 'notion of love as an esoteric mystery to be hidden from the "profanum vulgus"' (Gardner 180) that will recur repeatedly in poems hereafter in this chapter. Although not going as far as canonising his love, the speaker does wish to make it

exclusive, and sacred. His belief in his beloved enables him to have faith that she is indeed virtuous, although he cannot prove it absolutely through reason. His confession of faith goes further in that he is willing to do away with the distinction between male and female, and so make the lovers and their love one: to 'forget the Hee and Shee' (20). Just prior to this he indicates that the creed upon which his dismissal of sexual distinction is based – 'But he who lovelinesse within / Hath found, all outward loathes' (13-4) – is built around the rejection of outward (and therefore superficial), decaying beauty. It becomes a celebration of 'a love that is purely spiritual' (Low 60).

Donne's rejection of the conventional hymn to a mistress' physical beauty in favour of her hidden, inner qualities equates precisely with the speaker's subsequent use of religious language. He is unquestioning in his high estimation of his love, and openly celebrates the rewards that will be accorded to his love should due reverence be paid to it:

And if this love, though placed so,
From prophane men you hide,
Which will no faith on this bestow,
Or, if they doe, deride:

Then you've done a braver thing
Then all the *Worthies* did,
And a braver thence will spring
Which is, to keep that hid. (21-8)

In short, '[t]he "lovelinesse within", enjoyed by Donne in this poem, is presented as an immaculate privacy, which it would be desecration to speak of' (Carey 130). But in declaring his faith in the woman and being specific about its nature in these verses, the speaker is not just confessing to a fellow initiate, but to those 'prophane men' who do not share his faith and may deride him. Hence, he advises hiding the love from the unbelievers so that it will not be defamed, or cheapened by their ignorance and scorn. There is also a suggestion that keeping the love hidden from common view will increase its worth; perhaps because the speaker regards virtue a rarity, he considers it

more courageous to hide one's love than publicly celebrate it. While the speaker does not use obviously sacred words to describe his love, the fact that he sees the profane men as 'them', and himself, the woman and the addressee as 'us', does indicate a desire to distance themselves from, and even elevate themselves above the ordinary, faithless kind of love.

'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning' continues the dichotomy between the lovers and the profane majority; if anything, the gap is made bigger by the ways in which the lovers circumvent the painful reality of the separation facing them. The whole poem is, in consequence, a triumphant negation of the speaker's 'I must goe' (22), which cannot also help but acknowledge the truth that '[Man] is not sent into this world to live out of it, but to live in it' (*Sermons* 7.104). It begins with a simile about the uncertainty of death that the speaker turns into an act of positive defiance, urging his beloved,

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
'Twere prophanation of our joyes
To tell the layetie our love. (5-8)

He is in no doubt about the sanctity of their love, given his statement of faith in lines seven and eight, and he goes on to tell his beloved and us why their love is different from that of 'Dull sublunary lovers' (13). The speaker declares that theirs is not like that of the 'layetie', whose 'love / . . . cannot admit / Absence, because it doth remove / Those things which elemented it' (13-6). In contrast, their love is so refined that they do not quite know what it is themselves, but are, nevertheless, 'Inter-assured of the mind, / Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse' (18-20).

Significantly, although Donne is arguing here that bodily contact is not necessary to love, because these lovers are not confined to merely base, physically 'elemented' love, he is not, therefore, automatically disparaging

the body.³⁹ If anything, 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning' bears out Donne's philosophy that 'Man is not all soule, but a body too; and, as God hath married them together in thee, so hath he commanded them mutuall duties towards one another; and God allowes us large uses of *temporall blessings*, and of recreations' (*Sermons* 4.226). As the lovers' relationship becomes more spiritual through necessity, the speaker's metaphors become more concrete: from death-bed, the movement of the earth and spheres, to gold, and finally the pair of twin compasses:

Though like "The Exstasie" this poem moves from the mundane to the absolute, the progression of images is gradual: from the implicitly circular movement of separating souls to that of the spheres, then to that of expanding gold, finally to the explicitly perfect circle drawn by the compasses. These movements are strongly opposed to the imperfect movements of merely sensual lovers. (Mann 1978 67)

I consequently believe that Patrides is mistaken in not regarding 'A Valediction' as the most consistently spiritual of Donne's secular poems (xxviii). He feels that the 'nominal argument is that lovers may without alarm be parted physically since they are joined spiritually' (xxvii), but that in actuality the argument '– consciously on the part of the poet, "unconsciously" on the part of the narrator – is that the physical separation of the lovers will matter very much, as matter very much it must' (xxviii). Yes, the speaker may have far to roam (30), but the lovers find a beginning and an end in each other, the completeness of which only adds to their sanctity, and distinguishes them from the laity. The sexual puns on 'stiffe' (26), and 'erect' (32) do not detract from this, since their 'refin'd' love is made up of both body and spirit.

³⁹ In the Tenth Expostulation of his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, Donne astutely comments, not exactly sympathetically, on St. Augustine's famous hatred of the body: 'Thy blessed servant *August*, confesses that hee was *ashamed of his shamefastnes, and tendernes of Conscience, and that he often belied himself with sinnes, which he never did, lest he should be unacceptable to his sinfull companions*' (53).

'Aire and Angels' goes about melding body and soul, profane and sacred love together in a different way; one that, except for a few moments only, is anything but a conventional Petrarchan panegyric to an unattainable mistress. As Carey puts it, the poem 'seeks a compromise between Love which is wholly insubstantial and love which substance overburdens' (269). Although the lover begins by comparing the beloved to an angel, 'So in a voice, so in a shapelesse flame, / *Angells* affect us oft and worship'd be' (3-4), his classification of her as such is not as simple as it seems. He almost immediately goes on to clarify his love:

But since my soule, whose child love is,
Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
More subtile then the parent is,
Love must not be, but take a body too,
And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid Love aske, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fixe it selfe in thy lips, eye, and brow. (7-14)

So far, the woman's being compared to an angel, albeit in human form, goes some way to achieving the melding of sacred love, in the shape of the angel, and profane, in the body. But, as always, Donne departs from the predictable, not following unthinkingly the easy path of convention. Again, I do not mean to suggest that he is being completely original here: rather he is making use of tradition for his own ends. Nonetheless, '[t]he comparison of girl to angel is never at risk of being a compliment, as it would be in standard Elizabethan poetic usage. It communicates a wonder' (Carey 42).

Donne must then explain the nature of his worship of his angel-like lover, since it has a bearing on the kind of love he is bestowing upon the woman. He says:

Ev'ry thy haire for love to worke upon
Is much too much, some fitter must be sought;
For, nor in nothing, nor in things
Extreme, and scatt'ring bright, can love inhere;

Then as an Angell, face, and wings
Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
So thy love may be my loves sphere. (19-25)

The word 'inhere', at line 22, like 'assume' (line 13), has theological connotations, which Helen Gardner explains thus: 'The redeemed "inhere" in Christ. Love cannot inhere in nothing or in things that however beautiful are still material, but only in love' (205). This is why the woman is compared to an angel, for when the speaker first finds her, 'Some lovely glorious nothing I did see' (6). Only in the final three lines are we explicitly told the true reason for the conceit of the angel, and what the lover thinks of the woman: 'Just such disparitie / As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie, / 'Twixt womens love, and mens will ever bee' (26-8). Underlying of all this is the assumption that it is orthodox doctrine that 'women's love is less pure than men's' (Gardner 205). The angel consequently loses some of her sacredness when we realise that the image stems from the speaker's need for an adequate vessel for his love, rather than from an unselfish love of the woman. Helen Gardner does wonder whether 'In light of the universal assumption of the superiority of masculine love Donne's close seems aimed to diminish the distinction between man's love (which is pure spirit) and woman's (which is the most rarefied of material things)' (206). However, the indeterminacy surrounding these last three lines does not end there, for Patrides sees things much more ambiguously than Gardner, suggesting four alternative interpretations of the last three lines. 'Do' he asks, 'the lines assert that (1) women's love is purer than men's, (2) men's is purer than women's, (3) both, (4) neither?' (19 [note to lines 26-8]); any of these options have the potential to utterly skew the poem and what it is saying about love. But Redpath provides a third interpretation, which I find sensible: 'The last lines are possibly something of a piece of banter. I do not believe the joke (if joke it be) to be read as an insult, or that it would have been taken as such by an intelligent woman' (197). In saying this Redpath eschews indecision, and in doing so, I believe, expresses more accurately the speaker's striving to capture – however fleetingly – the

essence of his love, which, albeit distilled, remains a mixture of the human and the divine.

'The Exstasie' intertwines the sacred and the profane in an even more esoteric manner, yet one that strongly retains the related, crucial connection between body and soul. 'For Donne the relation of true lovers represents the ideal relation of body and soul, because it requires the participation of both body and soul' (Mann 1978 66). It is also one of the few poems of the *Songs and Sonets* whose love is purely of the Neoplatonic variety, so that the imagery is not that of Christianity, but of the lovers' two souls leaving their bodies and mingling in an ecstasy of their own making. The poem's subject, ecstasy, is that of a 'rare experience in which the lovers discover the truth about their love' (Gardner 262). There is no divine intervention from on high, nor a desire on the part of the lovers to seek anything outside of themselves in order to achieve sanctity: they are 'one anothers best' (4). They are involved in a 'marvel' that 'is nonetheless a mystery and a miracle because they here apprehend it for themselves, without supernatural intervention' (Smith 1985 188).

It is something of an irony that 'The Exstasie' is often considered difficult, or obscure in meaning, when Donne, in fact, provides explicit illustrations throughout of the kind of love that so occupies the lovers. A particularly good example is the speaker's explanation of their rising above sex, and the ways in which love has altered their souls:

This Extasie doth unperplex
 (We said) and tell us what we love,
 We see by this, it was not sexe,
 We see, we saw not what did move:

But as all severall soules containe
 Mixture of things, they know not what,
 Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,
 And makes both one, each this and that. (29-36)

Like the lovers in 'The Undertaking' who have 'forgot the Hee and Shee', 'they are drawn together by a love beyond difference of sex' (Smith 1985 189).⁴⁰

This does not mean, however, that they have abandoned the physical, bodily aspect to their love, for this is still very much an important part of what makes them whole. Prominent in the gradual movement from pure spirit to bodies inhabited by souls is the lovers' understanding that just as 'blood labours to beget / Spirits, as like soules as it can' (61-2), 'So must pure lovers soules descend / T'affections, and to faculties, / That sense may reach and apprehend' (65-7). Unlike the lovers of, say, 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning', these lovers are unselfish in sharing their love. They see themselves as having a duty to show their love to others, so that 'Weake men on love reveal'd may looke' (70) and know what 'pure lovers soules' (65) in their bodies are like. They further enjoin a nameless listener, in both the seventh and last stanzas, who understands their 'soules language' (22), and who has 'heard this dialogue of one' (74), to 'still marke us, [and] he shall see / Small change when we're to bodies gone' (75-6). Donne's particular triumph here is that, as Smith puts it, '[w]ithout denying the momentariness of the impulses of sense, "The Ecstasy" enacts a pattern of sexual love which can yet survive the sating of desire, and stand beyond casualty and time' (1985 195).

Yet, for all Donne's apparent certainty as to the nature and efficacy of the couple's love, 'The Exstasie' is not without ambiguity. As Guibbory notes, 'There seems to be a conscious indeterminacy in ['The Exstasie'], which plays on what seems an extraordinarily fine line between devotion and blasphemy, between sanctified love and idolatrous worship of the body' (9). This 'conscious indeterminacy' should not be seen as a negative aspect of the poem, however; in fact, the very opposite is true. These are the lines at

⁴⁰ There is another interpretation of 'The Exstasie', however, put forward by Pierre Legouis. He argues that the poem is part of the 'seducer's [speaker's] scheme' (67) to get the woman into bed, and that Donne 'considers the particular case of a couple who have been playing at Platonic love, sincerely enough on the woman's part, and imagines how they would pass from it to carnal enjoyment' (68-9).

the centre of the alleged ambiguity: 'But O alas, so long, so farre / Our bodies why do doe wee forbear? / They're ours, though they are not wee' (49-51). It is significant that 'By creating multiple connections among its parts, by defining "we" first as the body, then as the soul, the analogy suggests that any division between the speaker's physical and spiritual selves is insignificant or illusory. . . . [and creates a] vision of human beings as mysteriously and wonderfully indivisible' (Farmer 207). Although Donne concludes this stanza by declaring that 'Wee are / Th'intelligences, they the spheres' (51-2), the distinction implied is one merely of classification, not separation; in the Ptolemaic universe the spheres were inhabited by the intelligences, so Donne's body is inhabited by his soul. We have already seen that the lovers consider it the duty of their souls to return to their bodies so that 'Weake men on love reveal'd may looke' (70). Concomitant with the lovers' service to the profane masses is Donne's awareness that 'Loves mysteries in soules doe grow, / But yet the body is his booke' (71-2). In order for these 'weake men' to apprehend the divine nature of the lovers' experiences, they need some kind of visible proof, for which the lovers' bodies will serve. Underpinning this intermingling of the earthly and the sacred is Donne's belief that 'quintessential love consists in understanding' (Brooks 56).

In 'A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day, being the shortest day' Donne's handling of the absence of a dichotomy between sacred and profane love assumes a deeply melancholic aspect, as the joyous, hopeful, and etherealised visions of 'Aire and Angels' or 'The Exstasie' are replaced by reflections on the transience of love. It is a poem that has been aptly described by Helen Gardner as 'the most profound expression of the sensation of utter and irremediable loss' (251), made the more profound because it is a separation, a parting caused by death, not just overseas travel, as has been conjectured concerning 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning'.⁴¹

⁴¹ 'According to Walton's conjecture, Donne on leaving for the Continent in 1611 wrote this poem and the *Song* "Sweetest love". . . for his wife; but it is by no means certain that this was in fact so' (Patrides 46).

Yet I believe, with Warnke, 'that this work is, simultaneously, an amorous poem and a religious poem' (53); that there is an underlying sense of the possibility of the couple's love becoming sacred (after a fashion), despite their separation. In a way that was only hinted at in 'Negative Love', Donne uses negation, expressed in the language of alchemy, as the means of qualifying and honouring his love. It is significant that he does not use the explicitly sacred language of, for example, 'A Valediction: of the Booke', or 'The Canonization' here, for his thoughts of reverence towards and preservation of his beloved – his 'Vigill' of line 44 – do not run along the same lines as these. He does not speak of crowds of adoring worshippers, but of a solitary watch at the hour of 'the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight' (45). Superficially, at least from such evidence as this, the speaker appears immured in his own self-pity.

The reality is, however, quite different, for there is a very strong sense that he is sufficiently aware of the impact of his love to want to make an example of himself and the purity of his love. Like the speaker in 'The Relique', he looks to those who will come after him, declaring,

Study mee then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:
For I am every dead thing,
In whom love wrought new Alchimie. (10-3)

This comes after his melancholic assessment that 'The world's whole sap is sunke' (5); and that 'life is shrunke, / Dead and enterr'd; yet all these seem to laugh, / Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph' (7-9). He not only compares himself with the withered landscape, finding the latter wanting when placed alongside himself and his grief, but also, again, argues for the primacy of his love and loss when he states that

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have;
I, by love's limbecke, am the grave

Of all, that's nothing. (19-22)

This insistence by the speaker upon and reiteration of the negative, of the absent, of deprivation, is the paradox that ultimately proves the sanctity of his love. Since he cannot physically enjoy his beloved, he chooses instead to become 'by her death. . . / Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown' (28-9). He looks to alchemy to transform him into something else than his present state; it is to be pure nothing. Accordingly, this 'quintessence' comes from 'nothingness' (15), and results in the bereaved speaker being 're-begot / Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not' (17-8). In another distinction between himself and 'all others' (and an echo of the 'layetie' of 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning'), the speaker sets himself apart from them in describing his nothingness. 'If I an ordinary nothing were, / As shadow, a light, and body must be here. / But I am None' (35-7). Just as together with his beloved there was no fear of rising above the physical,⁴² so in solitude the speaker is unlike the usual mourner, both more grief-stricken, and less concerned with the earthly, sensual side to his love.

In a curious irony the speaker's withdrawal from the world and his focus on nothingness, both potentially negative, are the means by which, as Shullenberger puts it, he 'becomes a redemptive agent of love, in effect an antimatter version of the philosopher's stone' (51). His nothingness acts as the conduit through which 'All others, from all things, draw all that's good' (19). What makes this possible is the fact that the speaker is not just 'an ordinary nothing' (25). From the start he has styled himself as being without peer, first as the rundown world's 'Epitaph' (9), then as 'every dead thing' (12), and ultimately as the 'first nothing, the Elixer grown' (29). The speaker's act of alchemical transformation into the antithesis of ordinary existence, into what he calls absolute nothingness (the 'None' of line 37), is also an act of

⁴² He says, 'oft did we grow / To be two Chaosses, when we did show / Care to ought else; and often absences / Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses' (24-7), in what is a clear accord with the lovers of 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning', whose love is equally as sacred because of their similar ability to go beyond the merely physical.

‘sacrificial devotion and esoteric instruction’ (Shullenberger 50) for those lovers that are yet to come.

The speaker’s stratagems in ‘A Valediction: of the Booke’ as to the preservation and sanctification of his love (both subject and object) return, in contrast to ‘A Nocturnall’, to the exuberant optimism of earlier poems. More than this, ‘A Valediction: of the Booke’ is the first of four poems,⁴³ I believe, which Donne deliberately unifies through their imagery. It is more than just coincidence that, as the love described and displayed in these poems becomes more private and more consciously sacred, so in direct proportion is their imagery more concrete, material: books; verse; bones; hair.

For the speaker in ‘A Valediction: of the Booke’, then, his wish to eternalise his love is expressed in the conceit of recording it for posterity as his way of angering ‘destiny’ (2). Such means of conserving one’s love have, of course, many other examples in Renaissance literature; Donne, I think, goes one step further, beyond the hackneyed convention. The lovers’ ‘manuscripts’ (10), the letters that have passed between them, will not only serve as the (secular) ‘Annals’ (12) of their love, but as the bible of true love. The pair boast that therein

the faith of any ground
No schismatique will dare to wound,
That sees, how Love this grace to us affords,
To make, to keepe, to use, to be these his Records. (15-8)

Even half-hearted believers will not scorn the truth of the love that they read in Love’s records. The speaker continues:

This Booke, as long-liv’d as the elements,
Or as the worlds forme, this all-graved tome,
In cypher write, or new made Idiome;
Wee for loves clergie only’are instruments. (19-22)

⁴³ The other three are the final poems in this chapter: ‘The Canonization’, ‘The Relique’ and ‘The Funerall’.

Importantly, the record of their love will be made sacred because 'the book is to be written in a secret alphabet or secret language so that only the clergy can read it. . . . [For t]he mysteries of love are not for the profane laity' (Gardner 194). Again, we see Donne making the distinction between those who have knowledge, who have been ordained into the mysteries and sacraments of love, and those who have not; however, these exegetes, in contrast to those of *The Song of Songs*, revel in and celebrate sensual earthly love. And in this particular instance, only those who are literate in the language of the lovers' 'cypher' are to be allowed access to the record of their love. Like the Bible, this book of love will contain wonders, and secret knowledge essential for the ordained faithful:

Here Loves Divines, (since all Divinity
Is love or wonder) may finde all they seeke,
Whether abstract spirituall love they like,
Their Soules exhal'd with what they do not see,
Or, loath so to amuze
Faithes infirmitie, they chuse
Something which they may see and use;
For, though minde be the heaven, where love doth sit,
Beauty'a convenient type may be to figure it. (28-36)

It is especially worth noting here that though the speaker says 'all Divinity / Is love or wonder', he does not forgo the balance between more spiritual, sacred love, and physically apprehensible love. There is an interesting echo of 'The Exstasie' – 'Loves mysteries in soules doe grow / But yet the body is his booke' (71-2) – in the lines 'For, though minde be the heaven, where love doth sit, / Beauty'a convenient type may be to figure it' (35-6). Like the speaker in 'The Exstasie', this one wants to allow as many of 'Loves Divines' to experience true love, and to see for themselves that such joy and wholeness far outweigh anything that the secular world can offer. What results is a comprehensive synthesis of sacred and profane love, with both the spiritual and bodily elements of love accounted for in the lovers'

book, with the mind, or spirit, not automatically superior to the body and physical beauty.

This conflation of the sacred and profane seems fairly innocuous when compared with the some of the criticism levelled at 'The Canonization', despite the fact that the poems are using similar language and imagery to describe and analyse their love. Wilbur Sanders protests that Donne is 'impertinently confounding merely carnality with a prime mystery of religion', and that from the title onwards he shows 'a disposition to push the "religion of love" over the brink into the exaggeration and absurdity it always borders upon' (22), while Frank Kermode says that Donne 'daringly treats profane love as if it were divine love' (1962, 67). In fact, nothing could be further from the truth, for from the title to the last word, 'love', this whole poem is a wonderfully creative development of the speaker's desire to make his love sacred.⁴⁴ His love may be described in terms of the world, whether that of the Court, or secular advancement, or the marketplace, yet he seeks to dissociate the two – witness his impatient 'So you will let me love' (9) of the first stanza, and his 'sardonic belittling of mundane activities' (Redpath 233). In the second stanza he goes on to argue for the negligible effect of his love on the world, asking what merchant ships his sighs have drowned, upon what lands his tears have trespassed when 'Soldiers finde warres, and Lawyers finde out still / Litigious men. . . / Though she and I do love' (16-8). Even the conventions of lines 19-27 are scarcely adequate to describe their love, as the speaker moves from metaphors of flies to tapers, the eagle, dove and phoenix, finally reducing it 'to one neutrall thing both sexes fit. / Wee dye and rise the same, and prove / Mysterious by this love' (25-7). This progression of conventional metaphors, however ultimately inadequate, is part of the miracle of love in which 'the masculine and feminine, normally as antipathetic as the Eagle and the Dove, are united, and united not just in life,

⁴⁴ I am supported in my earlier contention about Donne's deliberate unity of the sacred and the profane in the *Songs and Sonets* by Carey, who agrees that 'This deepening effect of religion on the love poetry is most apparent in "The Canonization", "The Relique" and "The Funerall". In the first of these we can positively feel the holiness welling up as the poem goes on' (42).

but, mysteriously, even in death, where they will “die”, or consummate their love’ (Kennedy 13-4).

In order for the speaker, therefore, to come anywhere close to an accurate expression of his love he has to go beyond the simply conventional. Donne uses the eternising conceit as the means of preserving the speaker’s love for posterity. The couple’s love is acknowledged perhaps to be unworthy of ‘tombes and hearse’ (29), but no matter, since it is unequivocally ‘fit for verse’ (30), where, we are told, ‘We’ll build in sonnets pretty roomes . . . / And by these hymnes, all shall approve / Us *Canoniz’d* for Love’ (32, 35-6). The last stanza is the crescendo of a poem that Patrides sees as ‘boldly conflating the secular and the sacred’ (10), where the speaker sincerely sees his love as divine, and justly sanctified. What makes this so striking, leaving aside the language for a moment, is that nowhere in the poem is the couple’s love ever said to be simply spiritual; their canonisation is to be granted on the strength and purity of their physical relationship – a love that is paradoxically ‘mysterious’ – as much as any spiritual merits the two share. This is evident in the description of the couple as ‘You whom reverend love / Hath made one anothers hermitage’ (37-8), for ‘in spite of the exaltation of the two saints of love, there is a strong physical element in the metaphor. . . . After all, this implies that the lovers inhabit each other’s bodies the way a hermit lives inside the building erected for him’ (Osterwalder 205). And hence the lovers’ injunction to the faithful of the future to invoke them from above for a ‘patterne’ of our love (45)⁴⁵ is directed at those for whom love has contracted the ‘whole worlds soule’ (40) into the eyes of their beloved, so ‘That they did all to you epitomize, / Countries, Townes, Courts’ (43-4). It is part of this paradox that while we grasp that ‘the emotion shared by the lovers is in some sense equatable with religious experience’, the poem (and certainly not the speaker) ‘does not tell us in quite what sense’ (Warnke 41-2).

⁴⁵ Patrides’ note to line 45 also glosses ‘patterne’ as ‘a technical term in Neoplatonic thought for Ideas in the mind of God’ (10), which makes very explicit the absence of the sacred / profane dichotomy in this poem, both in Donne’s language and his presentation of secular love.

Donne's 'confusion of physical love and religious devotion' (Warnke 40) is meant to remain just that: a 'riddle' (23).

'The Funerall', in its insistence on being 'simultaneously and indecisively sacred and secular, religious and anti-religious' (Carey 45) continues the equivocation demonstrated by 'The Canonization', but differs in its ambiguities. Whereas the speaker in 'The Canonization' works towards and celebrates the couple's elevation to sainthood, here the lover's servitude to his mistress colours his language, and gives him just the slightest hint of peevishness when, at the end of the poem, he tells her, 'since you would save none of mee, I bury some of you' (24). Earlier in the poem, however, he is adamant that whoever comes to shroud him should not touch, 'Nor question much / That subtile wreath of haire, which crowns mine arme' (2-3), which is to serve as the outward and visible sign of the inward and invisible mystery. He compares himself wreathed in a band of hair to prisoners, 'manacled, when they'are condemn'd to die' (16); but whether he is dying of love is not clear. Despite this uncertainty – which he does nothing to help clarify – he says

What ere shee meant by't, bury it with me,
 For since I am
 Loves martyr, it might breed idolatrie,
 If into others hands these Reliques came. (17-20)

There are some delicious ambiguities here, for while the speaker may consider himself a martyr for love, his relationship with his mistress, and most probably his death, have been private. This means we have to take his word for it that he really has suffered, and trust his declaration of martyrdom. His assertion that his bones and the wreath of hair are relics, too, requires belief, and an act of faith, on the part of those into whose hands they might fall, that the relics are worthy of veneration; a faith indeed, that he fears may succumb to idolatry when presented with these proofs of such love. Yet his very reluctance, or inability to be definite about these 'Reliques'

and the love of which they are symbols undermines his apparent control of the situation. It could, of course, be that 'The Funerall' 'begins solemnly and ends with a joke' (Low 56), in which case the speaker is dissembling when he talks of the couple's remains as 'Reliques'. There is a sense, too, in 'The Funerall', as in 'The Canonization' and 'The Relique', of Donne 'assum[ing] an artless tone, blandly inviting the reader into his grave, stage-managing his own death, providing her with souvenir relics, and opening one eye to check her response' (Sullivan 132).

Helen Gardner comments perceptively that 'The Relique' 'makes the same equivocal play with the mysteries of religion and the mysteries of love as "The Canonization"' (258), and we have already seen that both 'A Valediction: of the Booke' and 'The Funerall' also share in this ambiguity. The speaker stresses the miraculous nature of the couple's love throughout 'The Relique', and the sincerity of his belief in its sanctity is not really in question; it is with the physical proof of this sacred love that he plays an ironic game with the reader. In the first stanza the speaker urges the gravedigger, 'When my grave is broke up againe' (1), to interpret the 'bracelet of bright haire about the bone' (7) as proof 'that there a loving couple lies' (9), and therefore leave them alone. Although he says 'we lov'd well and faithfully' (23), his use of 'thinke' (8) introduces a degree of uncertainty to his instructions, for he is leaving open to individual interpretation the question of whether he and his mistress really were a loving couple in life, and now in death. He then offers a situation whereby, in a time of 'mis-devotion' (13), if they are brought to a bishop and king to be made

Reliques; then
 Thou shalt be'a Mary Magdalen, and I
 A something else thereby;
 All women shall adore us, and some men;
 And since at such times, miracles are sought,
 I would that age were by this paper taught
 What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought. (16-22)

The lovers are thus explicitly mistaken for Mary Magdalen, 'the great penitent of the Christian tradition' (Gardner 258), and 'a something else thereby' that could be Christ, because of the token. So not only is the speaker implicitly identifying himself and his mistress with venerated saints, and therefore objects of devotion, but with Christ himself.

The narrator continues and concludes this depiction of their love as sacred in the third stanza, where he begins by comparing himself and his mistress to their 'Guardian Angells' (26) in having risen above distinction of gender, and also being, like these angels, 'untarnished by sex' (Carey 44). As a final irony, and proof of just how exalted and sacred their love really is, the speaker admits that this poem, which is in itself a relic and testament to their love, is completely inadequate: 'but now alas, / All measure, and all language, I should passe, / Should I tell what a miracle shee was' (31-3). As Carey puts it:

To say what he wants to say about love, he has to imagine himself dead, and the girl shrivelled and cleansed to a glittering relic. The poem is religious because it strives to find a home for those instincts of worship and sanctity which we identify as the religious emotions; and it finds that home in the girl's chastity. . . The seriousness of religion's mystery transfigures the girl, and it does so because Donne is claiming that she is *more* serious than religion's mysteries: a human wonder. (44)

The speaker has almost gone beyond the limits of language in trying adequately to express the miraculous, and divine nature of his beloved.

'The Relique' is but the last of the sizable group of poems within the *Songs and Sonets* in which Donne conflates the sacred and profane in his quest to describe his earthly love. His juxtaposition of religious imagery and a secular subject occurs most frequently 'in those poems presenting a love relationship that is mutual, exclusive, committed, and as permanent as possible in a mutable, contingent world' (Guibbory 4-5). Consequently, this lack of distinction between the profane and sacred is more apparent in poems such as 'The Canonization' or 'The Exstasie', with their sustained

development of the secular in sacred terms, than in 'The Indifferent', for the latter is like the *Elegies* in its assessment of love as a transient and ultimately destructive emotion. Generally, the more frequent Donne's use of the sacred in the *Songs and Sonets* is, the more likely he is to be describing a relationship that, while remaining secular in its love, is sanctified and removed from the profane, ignorant mass of ordinary lovers.

Chapter 5: the *Divine Poems*

Unlike either the *Elegies* or the *Songs and Sonets*, the *Divine Poems*, and particularly the *Holy Sonnets*,⁴⁶ contain a fundamental paradox that is integral to an understanding of Donne's conflation of the sacred and secular in these poems.⁴⁷ For while his dismissal of any sacred/profane dichotomy in the *Holy Sonnets* is unequivocally connected to his practices in the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonets*, it differs in one crucial respect from these sequences: its critical reception. Essentially the paradox is one of Donne's orthodoxy and tradition versus critical accusations of his unsettling individualism. Stated plainly, the fact that '[s]exual imagery is obsessive in the *Holy Sonnets* (as religious imagery is in the amorous lyrics)' (Warnke 108) gets in the way of another fact just as irrefutable: that Donne is steadfastly orthodox in his use of secular/sexual imagery in the *Holy Sonnets*.⁴⁸ Adding to this irony is the not-uncommon disjunction between accepted generalisations about the absence of the sacred/profane dichotomy and specific criticism of individual sonnets. Take, for instance, Anthony Low's perceptive generalisation:

⁴⁶ All quotations from and references to the *Divine Poems* (of which the *Holy Sonnets* are part), are from Helen Gardner's 2nd edition of the *Divine Poems*, and referenced in the text by line number. Gardner's ordering and numbering of the nineteen *Holy Sonnets* differs from the more common unbroken numbering of 1-19 (see, for example, Patrides' edition), for she follows the original ordering and numbering of the 1633 and 1635 editions, and the Westmoreland MS of the poems, which divide the *Holy Sonnets* up into groups of twelve, four, and three poems, respectively. To avoid unnecessary confusion, I will refer to the *Holy Sonnets* by their first lines, and not by either their more commonly known numbers or Helen Gardner's numbering of them.

⁴⁷ The accepted dating of the *Holy Sonnets* lends support to the intermingling of the sacred and profane, for Donnean scholars now agree that the majority of the *Holy Sonnets* were written prior to Donne's ordination (see, for example, Warnke [104] and Patrides [335]). Izaak Walton, Donne's first, and perhaps most famous, biographer also makes it clear that just because Donne had become a priest, he did not abandon poetry *per se*. Rather, he 'was not so completely fallen out with heavenly Poetry as to forsake that: no not in his declining age; witnessed by many Divine Sonnets, and other high, holy and harmonious Composures' (61).

⁴⁸ See Chapter Two for an account of the tradition of allegorical exegesis in The Song of Songs, and, for instance, Anthony Low's succinct summation of the precedent for 'speaking about both the love between God and man and the love between God and his Church in sexual and marital terms' (65), both of which bear out my assertions in this chapter.

Critics of seventeenth-century literature have often remarked on the resemblances as well as the tensions between sacred devotional and secular love poetry. We know that sacred and secular loves have often been in conflict, but that in the expression they seem to include many of the same feelings and emotions and to employ many of the same images. (66)

Or consider Robert Nye's assertion (which I would argue is applicable not just to his religious poetry) that 'if Donne is ever to be read *whole* as a Christian poet. . . the division between sacred and profane must be broken down, or shifted, so that the seriousness of his commitment to love can be followed unbroken from beginning to end' (351). Yet negativity is also a part of even general criticism about the *Holy Sonnets*, 'with their daring, often outrageous analogies between sacred and human love' (Hester 206). The essence of these sonnets (and I believe also part of their brilliance), is that they 'do not repudiate the human love celebrated in Donne's love poems' (Mann 1985-6 546); however, this is also a primary cause of difficulty since 'Critics who fancy that religion is a sedate affair have found them unsatisfactory' (Carey 46). John Carey continues: 'Wilbur Sanders, for instance, complains of their "blustering sophistry" – quite a good description of the element that saves these great poems from the perfection of the merely devotional' (46). Consequently, despite Donne's inherent orthodoxy, the more overtly secular the imagery in the *Holy Sonnets*, the greater the critical disconcertion, discomfort, and sometimes out-right condemnation of Donne's use of the human in writing of sacred love.

Though by no means a comprehensive solution, anthropomorphism is one way of understanding how Donne contends with the sacred in the *Holy Sonnets*. From the Greek, meaning 'giving human shape' (Jackson), anthropomorphism has significant theological applications when it comes to dealing with the essentially unknowable nature of God. As Kerrigan puts it: 'As we cannot conceive of God except in terms conceivable to a human mind, our apprehension of a timeless, infinite, unsearchably wise deity must be anthropomorphic to one degree or another – as, arguably, must all our

apprehensions' (338). It is because the 'finite mind. . . cannot know infinite truth' (Beaston 99) that there has to be some kind of accommodation of the otherness of God. Hence this accommodation draws, most often, on the human in its striving to comprehend God, for the human, in all its facets, is what we know and understand.

Donne is not only aware of this accommodation, but in his *Sermons* adroitly expounds our necessarily anthropomorphic conceptions of God. In Chapter Two I quoted Donne's contention that scripture is full of human institutions as metaphors of the divine: 'GOD is *Love*, and the *Holy Ghost* is amorous in his *Metaphors*; everie where his Scriptures abound with notions of *Love*, of *Spouse*, of *Husband*, and *Marriadge-Songs*, and *Marriadge-Supper*, and *Marriadge-Bedde*' (*Sermons* 7.87). Equally direct, and of particular relevance to the *Holy Sonnets*, is his upholding of Solomon, the probable author of The Song of Songs, as deserving of his place in the Scriptures. Donne comments:

Solomon, whose disposition was amorous, and excessive in the love of women, when he turn'd to God, he departed not utterly from his old phrase and language, but having put a new, and a spiritual tincture, and form and habit into all his thoughts, and words, he conveyes all his loving approaches and applications to God, and all Gods gracious answers to his amorous soul, into songs, and Epithalamions, and meditations upon contracts, and marriages between God and his Church, and between God and his soul; as we see so evidently in all his other writings.
(*Sermons* 1.237)

In explaining and emphasising the 'spiritual tincture' of Solomon's writings, Donne reinforces the tradition of making the erotic spiritually acceptable through allegorising the relationship between Christ and the Church, and/or Christ and the individual soul. Yet there remains the ultimately unknowable mystery of God, and it is a conundrum with which Donne grapples in his *Sermons* and the *Holy Sonnets*. St. John's proclamation of the Incarnation, 'And the Word was made flesh' (John 1:14), is an encapsulation of the awesomeness of God. It is also, in a demonstrable sense, applicable to what

Donne is doing in the *Holy Sonnets*. Just as Christ became incarnate so that humankind might thereby know him, so, in a poetic sense, is Donne's anthropomorphising of God as an unambiguous metaphorical batterer, ravisher, or spouse, aiming to make the divine otherness, the infinite truth of God, apprehensible. For Donne, the corporeal body of a sonnet – its words – is the physical means by which he makes manifest his conception of the sacred; the 'flesh' to the invisible 'Word' of his faith. He writes of this in a sermon simply, and most persuasively, as the truth that 'Now love presumes knowledge; for. . . we can love nothing, but that which we do, or think we do understand' (*Sermons* 9.128).

Of course, Donne's need to know and describe God's love, in the *Holy Sonnets*, in language that renders it as 'that which we do, or think we do understand' takes many forms; after all, not all of the *Holy Sonnets* contain overtly earthly/sexual imagery in their depiction of divine love. The result is that four *Holy Sonnets*, discrete in their subjects, share strong echoes of various of the *Songs and Sonets*; yet the overwhelming sense in all of them is their undeniable orthodoxy of tone and expression. 'This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint' and 'At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow' recall the lovers in 'The Anniversarie' and their assertion that should their 'soules where nothing dwells but love' end up in heaven together, theirs shall be a 'love increased there above, / When bodies to their graves, soules from their grave remove' (17, 19-20). In 'This is my playes last scene', however, the speaker laments that 'gluttonous death will instantly unjoynt / My body, and soule' (5-6), and holy fear, rather than familiar love, is his anticipated emotion at seeing the face of God. Both 'Holy Sonnets' also feature a separation of the body and soul, with the lovers' two 'coarse[s]' (11) in 'The Anniversarie' akin to the speaker's 'earth-borne body' that 'in the earth shall dwell' (10) in 'This is my playes last scene', and in 'At the round earths imagin'd corners', the speaker's cry, 'arise, arise / From death, you numberlesse infinities / Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe' (2-4). However, the two religious sonnets differ from 'The Anniversarie' in that in

the latter the eternity of their souls derives from the lovers' faith in each other, while in the two 'Holy Sonnets' it is because of the speaker's hopeful faith in Christ. In 'At the round earths imagin'd corners' particularly, the reunification of body and soul is universal, and not limited to the speaker, or a pair of lovers. Furthermore, while the lovers in 'The Anniversarie' declare that 'Here upon earth, we' are Kings, and none but wee / Can be such Kings' (22-3), the speaker in 'This is my playes last scene' pleads to God to impute him righteous, and purge him of evil (13) so that he may 'leave the world, the flesh, and devill' (14), a desire for a separation of the profane from the sacred that occurs more than once in the *Holy Sonnets*.

In 'Death be not proud' the juxtaposition of the secular and the sacred, though no less orthodox, produces a greater sense of ambiguity. Helen Gardner (69) compares the line 'soonest our best men with thee doe goe' (7) with 'As virtuous men pass mildly' away, / And whisper to their soules, to goe' (1-2) from 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning'. The 'best' men's 'Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie' ('Death' 8) is similar to that calm acceptance shown by the 'virtuous men' of 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning', for it is the 'soules deliverie', through death, that liberates them to be with Christ. This freeing of souls is comparable to that in 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning', whose speaker urges his beloved, in imitating these 'virtuous men', to 'melt and make no noise' (5), and thereby achieve a comparable union. However, the ambiguity of the 'Holy Sonnet' is most evident, and marks the end of any similarities between it and 'A Valediction', in Donne's personification of death. Not unique in itself, Donne's direct challenge to Death as a 'slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men' (9), and his use of the familiar, second-person 'thou' when addressing Death, nonetheless sets it up as a subject with recognisably human qualities. The effect of this is to subsume the religious underpinnings of the sonnet – that 'One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally' (13) – beneath the speaker's invective against 'poore death' (4). Although this is a religious sonnet, its message of vanquishing death does not appear to be absolutely

dependent on Christ, since he is never named explicitly. The exact nature of the speaker's faith that 'Death thou shalt die' (14) is never described in specifically sacred terms; hence, the sonnet's tendency to seem not dissimilar, in a generalised way, to poems in the *Songs and Sonets* sequence.

'What if this present were the worlds last night?' differs from 'Death be not proud' in its tone and overtly religious focus, but it has in common with the latter a sustained use of secular imagery. Although this is not the sonnet's main focus, the lines 'Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell, / The picture of Christ crucified' (2-3) echo that of 'your picture in my heart' (4) in 'The Dampe'. The images diverge from this point, however, for while the idea of the beloved's picture being imprinted on the lover's heart is not original to Donne, these two metaphors of sacred and profane love are represented very differently. Christ is seen in his Passion, with tear-filled eyes, blood-filled frowns, and 'pierc'd head' (6): the antithesis of the stereotypical blazon of the earthly mistress. The speaker continues his distinction between the secular and the sacred with his classifying of his 'idolatrie' (9) and 'all my profane mistresses' (10) as a separate existence from his present situation; however, this does not prevent the crucified Christ's bloody face becoming a potential rival of all the 'profane mistresses' (Low 78). But unlike earthly beauty, which inevitably decays, the speaker's emphasis on Christ's 'beauteous forme' (14) is as a proof of divine compassion, which is only comparable to the pleas of secular lovers insofar as both lovers of women and God seek reassurance and forgiveness. By implicitly evoking the picture of Christ again at the end of the sonnet, Donne suggests that Christ's perfect humanity (as witnessed in his Passion) also includes physical perfection, making him both an object of love, worship and devotion without parallel and a divine exemplum to secular lovers.

Secular imagery plays a more substantial part in 'Oh, to vex me, contraryes meete in one', for while the speaker's last word may be 'feare' (14), it is his fear of his inadequate love, described in secular terms, that consumes him in this sonnet. In the first four lines there is no indication that

the speaker is addressing himself to God. Instead, he complains in a general way that 'Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott / A constant habit; that when I would not / I change in vowes, and in devotione' (2-4). It is only when he says that his 'contritione' (5) is as changeable as his 'profane love, and as soone forgott' (6), that it becomes clear that his 'vowes' and 'devotione' denote his love of God. Throughout the sonnet, in fact, Donne describes his changeable love of God in terms of earthly love, so that both are said to be 'As ridlingly distemperd, cold and hott, / As praying, as mute' (7-8) as each other; he makes no distinction between the infinity and nothingness of the two. Not only is Donne admitting to 'an indulgence in profane love' (Novarr 121), but also to the malaise of fickleness, which is evident, significantly, in the language he uses in addressing God, for it also blurs the differences between his profane and divine love. In his fear of rejection by God he admits, 'I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to day / In prayers, and flattering speaches I court God: / To morrow' I quake with true feare of his rod' (9-11). The secular is present in a strong suggestion of the Petrarchan lover in these three lines, for the speaker is unable to decide on the way in which he will approach God. He swings from extreme humility, in not daring to 'view heaven', to a brave attempt at confidence in his use of prayers and flattering speeches to woo a seemingly distant, yet beloved, deity. Finally, he hopes that fearful respect is the right emotion in the face of what seems to be God's rigidly judgemental attitude about supplicants' deviating from absolute fidelity towards him. Like a forlorn Petrarchan lover, Donne suffers 'fitts' (12) of uncertain fear, here devout in nature, and describes them as being like a 'fantastique Ague' (13). This affliction is his only proof of the reality of his love, for, like its Petrarchan equivalent, the presence of Donne's fear, rather than any exuberant, passionate feelings of selfless love, is the evidence of his captivation by God. If Donne ceased fearing God's rejection of him, he would also cease loving him.

The profane world is present to an even greater extent in 'O might those sighes and teares return againe', for the speaker's anguished evaluation

of his current circumstances relies for its power on a detailed comparison with his earlier, secular actions and behaviour. As with 'Oh, to vex me, contraryes meete in one', the apposition of the human and the divine only serves to emphasise their fundamental similarities, despite the speaker's protestations to the contrary. In his present state of 'holy discontent' (3) the speaker wishes for the physical signs of remorse, those 'sighes and teares' (1), that were so abundant in his 'Idolatry' (5). He likens them to 'showres of raine' (5) and heart-rending 'griefs' (6), both of which he believes he suffered in vain when they were part of his fruitless mourning in the thrall of earthly love. Nevertheless, he still wants them to return to his breast and eyes so that they can aid him in his now divinely-motivated suffering. If we understand 'That sufferance was my sinne, now I repent' (7) to mean '*That* suffering in the past was sin; *now* I am engaged in a good work, repentance – but I still suffer' (77), as Gardner suggests, then Donne's plea for the return of his profane sighs and tears as part of his repentance makes sense. It is not his suffering that has changed, but its cause: repentance before God instead of a mistress. Yet for all that, I get a strong feeling of wistfulness, coupled with a faint air of reluctant martyrdom, in the speaker's complaint that

Th'hydroptique drunkard, and night-scouting thiefe,
The itchy Lecher, and selfe tickling proud
Have the remembrance of past joyes, for reliefe
Of comming ills. To (poore) me is allow'd
No ease: for, long, yet vehement grieve hath beene
Th'effect and cause, the punishment and sinne. (9-14)

While there is more (eternal) glory to be had in suffering for God, Donne cannot help but imply – the derogatory adjectives 'hydroptique', 'night-scouring' and 'itchy' notwithstanding – that these seekers after profane satisfaction have an advantage over him in their remembrances of 'past joyes'; styling himself '(poore) me' does not help his cause. They at least have some past pleasures to inure them to the 'coming ills' of their final judgement before God. He, on the other hand, has neither ease of conscience about past

behaviour, nor a feeling of moral superiority with which to console himself. His knowledge of his 'vehement grieffe' is what prevents him having a clear conscience, while to enjoy a feeling of superiority over those who have not yet repented of their sinfulness would be to commit the sin of pride.

The difficulties inherent in trying to maintain a dichotomy between sacred and profane love become, if anything, more obvious in 'Since she whome I lov'd, hath payd her last debt',⁴⁹ which like 'Oh, to vex me', is concerned with the discreteness of the secular and the holy' (Novarr 122). It is probable that Donne wrote this sonnet after the death of his wife, Ann, in 1617,⁵⁰ a circumstance that, while not imperative in itself, does lend great poignancy to his struggle to convince himself that 'human love at its best' really is 'contained within divine love' (Mann 1985-6 544). The apparent certainty of the first four lines is thus not what it appears:

Since she whome I lov'd, hath payd her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soule early'into heaven ravished,
Wholy in heavenly things my mind is sett. (1-4)

The initial sense of these lines – that because the soul of 'she whome I lov'd' is now in heaven, 'Wholy in heavenly things my mind is sett' – quickly gives way to ambiguity about where Donne's earthly love ends and his love for God begins. While Donne's love for his wife 'led him to rise above the profane and seek God' (Hester 198), this first quatrain also 'implies at least

⁴⁹ Though not strictly relevant to my argument at this point, an observation of Joy Linsley's about this sonnet is worth noting, for what she says makes an interesting and perhaps unintentional connection between 'Since she whome I lov'd' and some of the *Songs and Sonets*. Linsley writes, 'The poem is. . . very self-protective in that it is written for the few who understand the nature of [Donne's] loss and who accept his grief for what it is, a grief too deep to express except to those who break through the puzzles of this work' (209-10). Like 'The Canonization', or 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning', whose lovers hide their love from 'profane men', Donne's grief and its expression is reserved for those, like 'loves clergie' in 'A Valediction: of the Booke', who are initiated into true love's mysteries. In this case the profound mystery is the separation through death of the lovers, and how the bereft lover expresses his grief at losing her.

⁵⁰ See for example Patrides (349) and Gardner (78). All of the essays in *John Donne's 'desire of more': the Subject of Anne More Donne in His Poetry*, edited by M. Thomas Hester, provide a particularly detailed analysis of Ann Donne's subjectivity in this and others of Donne's poems.

the possibility that there was no room in him for divine love until his wife died' (Low 74). The ravishment of his wife's soul into heaven means that not only is his love directed upward towards God, but that, since she occupies a place in heaven with Christ, she is also now part of this love; she is both the object of his earthly love and part of his divine. Although David Novarr argues, correctly I believe, that in this quatrain, and the sonnet as a whole there is a 'competition' (125) between earthly love and heavenly, I do not agree with him that Donne therefore dichotomises them. It is this very lack of a sharp distinction between them that shows up Donne's 'difficulty [in] moving from human to divine love' (Low 74).

Indeed, the further through the sonnet we read, the less distinction between the sacred and the secular there proves to be. The assurance of 'Here the admyring her my mind did whett / To seek thee God; so streames do shew the head' (5-6) is instantly undercut with 'But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed, / A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett' (7-8). For with the 'But' of line seven Donne introduces doubts as to the efficacy and supposedly all-consuming nature of God's love. Despite his finding God, he is still 'consumed by unsatisfied desire' (Low 76), which in its form as 'holy thirsty dropsy' is only momentarily confined to God, for as he continues, and the more he conflates his secular and divine love, the further this sonnet develops into a 'stunningly candid confession of God's inadequacy' (Aers 70).

Hence, the turn of the poem, the 'But' of line nine, is where Donne's outright challenge to God's love – divine love's – superiority over earthly love begins in earnest. Donne is defensively defiant, asking 'But why should I begg more love, when as thou / Dost wooe my soule, for hers offring all thine' (9-10). By shifting the lover's task of actively seeking out the beloved's love onto God, and making Him the wooer of his soul, Donne, albeit ungraciously, appears to accept a passive amatory role at this point. He does not, however, completely abandon his decidedly querulous baiting of God, for in his question as to why he should 'begg more love', with its subordinate

clause of explanation, is a suggestion that God's offer of all His love in place of Donne's wife's might not be enough. Donne's accusatory tone continues and culminates with his allegation of God's possessive jealousy, telling Him that he

dost not only feare least I allow
My love to saints and Angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Least the World, fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out. (10-4)

The last line almost exactly mirrors that of 'This is my playes last scene', but here Donne reverses the role of jealous, fearful lover, with God cast in that role, a depiction that, for all its theological impossibility, nonetheless appears to render God as an insecure earthly lover. Consequently, God appears to be 'so careful that he worries *not only* about the dangers involved in loving saints and angels *but even* about the threat posed by the world, the flesh and the devil' (Hester 191). It is because Donne cannot get away from the feeling that his earthly love for his wife is at least equal in value to his love for God that he sees the Father as a rival for his affections, describing him in terms of the doubting, suspicious lover. Accordingly, in His fears about the secular rivals for Donne's love God seems far removed from the deity of whom St. Paul writes confidently that 'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:38-9). However, Donne does make an important qualification about God's 'tender jealousie' elsewhere, saying, 'As jealousie is a care and not a suspition, God is not ashamed to protest of himself that he is a jealous God. . . . Jealousie that implies care, and honour, and counsel, and tendernesse, is rooted in God, for God is a jealous God, and his servants are jealous servants' (*Sermons* 3.248). While God's jealousy is not, therefore, of the same kind as the human emotion, it is significant that, servant of God or not, Donne is also displaying

the same kind of all-consuming jealousy in his love for his wife. Like God's, Donne's jealous love 'implies care, and honour. . . and tendernesse', all things which make it difficult for him to choose absolutely between the two types of love. Rather, he comes closer to God through his realisation of their fundamental similarity.

'A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany' makes an interesting pairing with 'Since she whome I lov'd', for in its 'theme of gradual detachment from earthly loves' (Mann 1985-6 547) there is much that marks it out as sympathetic in tone to the earlier poem. In what Lindsay Mann describes as 'the most extended treatment of human and divine love in Donne's religious poetry' (1985-6 547), Donne's actual journey to Germany, in 1619, lies behind such references to departure and absence as 'I sacrifice this Iland unto thee, / And all whome I lov'd there, and who lov'd mee' (8-9), whereby he gives up England and those whom he loved into God's keeping. Here there is also, despite the longer lapse of time since Ann Donne's death, an identifiably similar challenge to God to prove himself worthy of Donne's love:

Nor thou nor thy religion dost controule,
The amorousnesse of an harmonious Soule,
But thou would'st have that love thy selfe: As thou
Art jealous, Lord, so am I jealous now,
Thou lov'st not, till from loving more, thou free
My soule: Who ever gives, takes libertie:
O, if thou car'st not whom I love, alas, thou lov'st not mee.
(15-21)

As with 'Since she whome I lov'd', Donne 'does not repudiate human loves' (Mann 1985-6 547), but acknowledges, and indeed celebrates his jealousy for his earthly love, a jealous 'amorousnesse' that will not submit to arbitrary control by God or his 'religion'. Donne's jealousy is not such that he is steadfastly opposed to giving up all he now has, but he does fear that God 'car'st not whom I love', an attitude that by implication denigrates the worth of Donne's earthly, but not inferior love. He wants to be sure on earth,

however futile he knows such a wish to be, that the 'libertie' promised by God in heaven is to be worth his trading of human for divine love. Even in finally agreeing to the sealing of 'this bill of my Divorce to All, / On whom those fainter beames of love did fall' (22-3) Donne still distinguishes between 'those loves, which in youth scatter'd bee / On Fame, Wit, Hopes (false mistresses) to thee' (24-5), and all those on earth whom he loved, and who loved him in return. Although there is perhaps a greater acceptance here than in 'Since she whome I lov'd' that death entails letting go of earthly love, both poems' treatment of human and divine love stress the worth and interconnectedness of the two, and that the cherishing of the one leads to the greater valuing of the other.

However, in 'Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so bright and cleare' Donne's intermingling of the sacred and profane comes up against sustained critical discomfort at his deliberate conflation of the holy and the sexual in his search for the true Church. Of a number of paradoxes contained in the 'Holy Sonnet' not least amongst them (and a point worth stressing in the light of my subsequent discussion), is Donne's reliance on scriptural sources for his extended metaphor of the church as Christ's spouse. Amongst various passages⁵¹ suggested as support for Donne's use of the trope of the church as Christ's spouse is this from Ephesians:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.
For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:
For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Lukas Erne's 'Donne and Christ's Spouse' (228), note 35.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:25-32)

St. Paul is unambiguous in his insistence that he is speaking metaphorically to the Ephesians, and that what he has to say about love and marriage, while equally applicable to men and women, primarily concerns Christ and 'a glorious church' which is 'holy and without blemish'. Nonetheless, in order to make himself better understood he considers it perfectly natural, and an aid to exposition, to stress the similarities between human and divine marriage. The reciprocal nature of married love, the cherishing of one's spouse and the two becoming 'one flesh', are not just to be striven for by earthly couples, but will also define the spiritual marriage of Christ and his spotless Church.

In the first eight lines of 'Show me deare Christ' Donne's orthodoxy is such, in following St. Paul's allegorical example in his search for the true Church, that there is seemingly little to warrant Maureen Sabine's comment about the 'lurid tone of this gripping sonnet' (106). Donne methodically questions the various earthly manifestations of the church, each personified in a different way. He asks whether the church is 'she, which on the other shore / Goes richly painted?' (2-3); is it she 'which rob'd and tore / Laments and mournes in Germany and here?' (3-4), or is it the church asleep for a thousand years that 'then peepes up one yeare?' (5). His overt historicising of the churches, into the 'richly painted' Catholic Church, the oppressed, bereft and righteous Protestant Churches of England and Germany, and stark Genevan Calvinism is more than just an exercise in personal bias, however, for all of them are described pejoratively. Not even the Church in England is exempt from censure. The suspicion that 'all three lack the qualities belonging to the true Church' (Erne 214) is reinforced in the next line when

Donne goes on to ask, 'Is she selfe truth and errs?' (6).⁵² His rejection of the three churches is thus twofold, for his imagery of the churches as three types of the imperfect, and by implication sinful, woman combines with his disbelief that any of these churches can contain the essence of Christ's church and yet be so clearly in error. Donne's focus, so far, is on objectively determining what the true Church is not, rather than what she is; as yet, 'the revelation sought is only distantly sexual' (Kerrigan 357).

It is in the last quatrain and couplet of 'Show me deare Christ', where the secular becomes sexual, that Donne's use of the secular to describe the divine – his anthropomorphism – really makes itself felt, for it is where we see played out what Kerrigan calls an 'alarming extension of a traditional metaphor' (338). Donne begins with the last of his rhetorical questions, and then goes on to plead with Christ to show him the true Church:

Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights
First travaile we to seeke and then make love?
Betray kind husband thy spouse to our sights,
And let myne amorous soule court thy mild Dove,
Who is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then
When she's embrac'd and open to most men. (9-14)

The bare sense of these six lines is that the church is a spiritual object of adoration being desired in language of sexual courtship, with Christ asked, as her bridegroom, to 'betray' her to ordinary people, so that she is 'open to most men' (14). Yet this image of an open, available Church is intensely erotic – perhaps the 'boldest erotic image in Donne's sacred poetry' (Patrides 350) – and when expressed in such sexually ambiguous terms, leaves no space for a gap between profane and sacred love. The ambiguity starts at line

⁵² *Satyre III* is another striking example of Donne's extended metaphorical description of 'the figure of the Church as the "mystical bride" of the Scriptures, eternally perfect, outside of time' (Mann 1985-6 540), with close parallels to 'Show me deare Christ' in its imagery and ideas, especially from line 43 onwards. Unlike 'Show me deare Christ' the *Satyre* does describe the location of the true Church, which 'on a huge hill, / Cragg'd, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will / Reach her, about must, and about must goe' (79-81). Yet Donne is equally dismissive of the Roman (lines 43-8), Genevan (49-54) and English Churches (55-62), and also scorns those who 'doth abhorre / all, because all cannot be good, as one / Knowing some women whores, dares marry none' (62-4).

nine, with Donne invoking the conventions of chivalry and courtly love in his simile of the collective seekers of the true church as like knightly suitors off on an adventuring quest after the elusive, but inestimably valuable lady. He then returns to the same metaphor that began the sonnet, shifting from the imperative 'Show' to the equally forceful 'Betray' in asking Christ, the 'kind husband' to display his spouse. Kermode gives some indication of why many people find Donne's development of this metaphor difficult:

Perhaps we dislike the metaphor. . . because the image of the Church as the Bride is no longer absolutely commonplace; but having accepted the image, we are still unwilling to accept its development, even though we see that its main point is the glorious difference of this from a merely human marriage. Something is asked of us that we can no longer easily give.
(1964 39)

Kerrigan is even blunter in his assessment of the church-as-spouse metaphor and its impact on people like Kermode, for he realises that it is 'Donne's eagerness to display the most anthropomorphic consequences of anthropomorphism – in short, to imagine with some detail the sexuality of God' (340) – that is the cause of so much mental squirming. Anthony Low is another critic who acknowledges Donne's orthodoxy, but also understands that '[t]he fundamental difficulty in "Show me deare Christ" is that Donne has crossed the wires between the two traditional versions of the biblical marriage trope: the marriage between Christ and his Church, and the marriage between God and his soul' (76-7). Low, I believe, speaks for many when he says that 'the result of Donne's having introduced this strange variant of the biblical metaphors into the poem is that we soon find we have on our hands a *ménage à trois*, if not worse. Christ and the speaker have essentially been transformed into rivals for the lady's affections' (77). These 'rivals for the lady's affections' are, moreover, intent on making spiritual love to the Bride of Christ in the most secular of language.

Yet amidst the critical dismay at the 'shocking eroticism of the last four lines' (Novarr 140) of 'Show me deare Christ', Donne revels in a paradox centred on the spouse 'Who is most trew, and pleasing to [Christ], then / When she's embrac'd and open to most men' (13-4). It is that '[t]he bride is "most trew" when most unfaithful: she is at one time "selfe truth" and yet "errs". The husband finds her "most. . . pleasing" when human cuckolds find their wives most abhorrent: in her openness she will please him as a "most trew" spouse' (Kerrigan 358). The juxtaposition of the sacred and the secular could hardly be more extreme, for what Donne is asking us to accept in faith, to use Kerrigan's phrase, is a 'holy adultery' (338) sanctioned in the eyes of God. However, simply dismissing the paradox of the spouse's promiscuity as 'merely gratuitous', as Wilbur Sanders does (124), makes a mockery of the sonnet; Donne is not out to shock or offend just because he can. Rather, a less negative reading of the absence of a gap between the sacred and the profane has in it an awareness of Donne's desire for 'the approach of an age when the seat of worship will be located only in the human heart' (Rovang 12). The Bride's paradoxical openness then makes sense in the light of Christ's assurance that 'the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; . . . God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth' (John 3.23-4). Then, and only then, will the earthly location of the true Church cease to be such a contentious issue. At the same time, Donne's juxtaposition of the spirit and the flesh will no longer seem to be outrageous or shockingly extreme, but will be understood for what it is – a depiction of the perfect, true Church that has the human and divine in equal measure, each complementary and necessary to the other.

In a less inflammatory way the secular and the profane are also present in the 'Holy Sonnet' 'As due by many titles I resigne', and in 'Ascention' from *La Corona*, two poems which, between them, contain much of the same language and imagery as another, arguably infamous, 'Holy Sonnet': 'Batter my heart, three person'd God'. In 'Ascention', as part of the

speaker's humble awe at Christ's sacrifice, he praises the Trinity as 'O strong Ramme, which has batter'd heaven for mee, / Mild lambe, which with thy blood, hast mark'd the path; / Bright torch, which shin'st, that I the way may see' (9-11). The 'strong Ramme', 'Mild lambe' and 'Bright torch' recall something of the threefold pattern of verbs in the first four lines of 'Batter my heart', while the 'strong Ramme, which hast batter'd heaven for mee' is a less surprising instance of the similar sentiment in 'Batter my heart'. Here, it is not the speaker's heart but the more usual heaven that is receiving the divine battering. Likewise, in 'As due by many titles I resigne', the more numerous examples of comparable imagery also equate with that found in 'Batter my heart', while always remaining unexceptional. There is a remarkably similar battle going on between Christ and the Devil for Donne's soul in the two poems, each described in language reminiscent of the other, with the 'devill' (9) the usurper in 'As due by many titles', and Donne 'like a usurpt towne' (5), 'betroth'd unto [the] enemy' (10) in 'Batter my heart'. The disconcerting image of Christ as ravisher in the latter sonnet also appears here in a slightly altered form, with the speaker asking Christ of the Devil, 'Why doth he steale nay ravish that's thy right?' (10). In making Satan his ravisher in 'As due by many titles' rather than Christ, but still acknowledging Christ's prior claim on him, Donne sufficiently distances himself from the more overtly sexual rendering of the image in 'Batter my heart'. Equally, Donne's impassioned wish in 'Batter my heart' to be loved by Christ is toned down in 'As due by many titles'. He says, 'Oh I shall soone despaire, when I doe see / That Thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not choose me, / And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee' (12-4). There is no mention of imprisonment and freedom or of chastity and ravishment; instead, he wants to be included as one of the multitude, and chosen and loved by Christ in place of Satan, who is jealous of Donne's soul in spite of himself.

Despite the imagery common to these three poems, the innocuousness of 'As due by many titles' and 'Ascention' could not be in starker contrast to the mixture of physical violence and sex in 'Batter my heart, three person'd

God'. Like 'Show me deare Christ' it juxtaposes sacred and profane love and Donne's orthodoxy and individualism in a manner that always provokes some kind of response, whether outrage, perplexity,⁵³ or varying degrees of admiration.⁵⁴ It has a reputation for being 'among the most powerful and brilliant as well as among the most disturbing of the *Holy Sonnets*', whose power is intensified 'precisely because it is so disturbing' (Low 79). And there is much that might indeed be considered disturbing. From its first word the sonnet's "'shocking" physicality' (Yarrow 211) assails the reader, with Donne's short, clipped phrasing of the first quatrain⁵⁵ vividly reinforced by its abrupt, almost entirely monosyllabic verbs, which gather momentum as they increase in number:

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow'mee,'and bend
Your force, to breake, blow, burn and make me new. (1-4)

The culmination is Donne's wish to be made new in heart and spirit, a newness paradoxically borne out of brokenness, destruction and fire. His demand for a physically violent demonstration of God's love is in direct proportion to his implicit sinfulness, for he admits that God's knocking alone is not strong enough to free him from his sin. It is only through God's breathing; shining; mending; breaking; blowing and burning of him – 'a Trinity working through trinities of verbs, and reflected in the sonnet as a whole in a trinity of metaphors' (Bedford 16) – that Donne believes he has any hope of rising and standing before God.

⁵³ Wilbur Sanders has something of a monopoly on the first response, while also not lagging far behind in his general confusion about the 'Holy Sonnet'.

⁵⁴ Craig Payne's insightful article in the *Explicator*, to take but one example, makes an interesting contrast with Sanders' approach to 'Batter my heart'.

⁵⁵ There is critical disagreement about the interpretation of lines 1-4 and the meaning of Donne's metaphors therein. See, for example, Bedford's 1982 *Explicator* article for a useful summary of the earlier diverse arguments for God as a metalworker/potter etc., while Tunis Romein continues the discussion, in 'Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV.' *Explicator* 42.4 (1984): 12-4, arguing that in the first quatrain God is, in fact, a glass blower.

The second quatrain continues the overtly violent tone as part of the 'trinity of metaphors', but shifts in focus to similes of siege warfare, with the speaker 'like a usurpt towne' who is 'to' another due' (5). In the language of his martial analogy, Donne finds himself in the almost unbelievably precarious position of a stealthily captured town wanting to discuss terms with an insistent and well-equipped siege army, led by Divine Command, while yet remaining under the control of the occupying force, whose sappers have constructed sturdy and insidious salients from which to fortify, and then advance their hold on the town. Donne-the-besieged has another problem. However strenuously he may labour to admit God, it is all 'to no end, / Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend, / But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue' (6-8). He is unable to rely on Reason, as God's representative, to adequately defend him, since he cannot be sure of either its strength or loyalty under pressure. Significantly, Reason's 'capture' introduces to this mixture of the sacred and the profane the dangerous suspicion of doubt. If Reason is indeed God's viceroy, it is failing in its duty to protect Donne who, because of its capture, is left defenceless against God's enemy: the Devil.

Donne's consequent recourse in the final quatrain and couplet of 'Batter my heart' is a rich source of critical apoplexy, for he conflates the sacred and profane in such a way as to ensure that 'all at once we see the base and the miraculous' (Kerrigan 356). As with 'Show me deare Christ' there is no dichotomy at all between the human and divine. While in 'Batter my heart' umbrage is taken at the very idea of a person's betrothal to, divorce, and imprisonment in Christ – Sanders baulks at Donne's 'cheaply shocking' (129) imagery and language – the fact of Donne's orthodoxy is overlooked. Hosea 2:19 speaks of the Lord's love for his people in this way: 'And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies'. Or this from Isaiah: 'For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth

shall he be called' (Isaiah 54:5). In an expansion of Donne's insight that 'love presumes knowledge; for. . . we can love nothing, but that which we do, or think we do understand', Kerrigan reiterates that

the disturbing rape in the last line of "Batter my heart" should be understood as implicit in the ancient theological conceit of the righteous soul's marriage to God. If the good man weds God, then the sinful man weds God's "enemie", and if God would claim this recalcitrant soul, then he must grant divorce and possess her by force. . . . the accommodated marriage would enfold infidelity, divorce and even imprisonment. It would compress all the things which attend earthly marriages, the only ones we know, and the only ones our language can properly signify. (351-2)

Yet in his juxtaposition of the secular and the sacred at the end of 'Batter my heart', like 'Show me deare Christ', Donne uses 'a sexual image whose spiritual tenor is opposed to its physical vehicle' (Erne 221) to produce a suggestiveness verging on crude anthropomorphism. 'And crude anthropomorphism is another name for outright blasphemy' (Kerrigan 355).

These are the lines that so agitate critics:

Yet dearly'I love you, and would be lov'd faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy,
Divorce mee,'untie, or breake that knot againe,
Take me to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee. (11-4)

Donne's divorce from God's enemy, to whom he is 'betroth'd' (10), necessitates the breaking of the marriage knot, but may also require God to 'imprison' him so that he is safe from the Devil's advances. He desires to be enthralled completely by God's love, for it is only by being both utterly enchanted by him, and paradoxically made his captive, that Donne has any chance of eternal freedom. This freedom is bound up with a desire for spiritual chastity that can only be obtained through God's ravishment of the speaker, and expressed in sexual imagery. As Kerrigan notes, 'It is one thing

to run circles of wit about the straight-line orthodoxy of Petrarchan love poets, quite another to bend the cherished corners of dogma' (337), and this is precisely what Donne is doing. The fear of Donne's possible blasphemy, that 'If this is Christian devotion, it is surely devotion at the extreme verge of the permissible' (Low 80), for example, is a direct result of his dramatic address to God as both spouse and divine rapist. God is described in stunningly anthropomorphic imagery in Donne's 'equation of sensual passion to spiritual virtue' (Payne 211). Yet despite the fact (at least in Craig Payne's opinion) that 'By the poem's conclusion, the conceit of the rape which ensures chastity no longer skirts blasphemy', and that 'in Donne's hands, it even becomes orthodox, an ideal of devotion worthy of emulation' (211), the more usual reaction is one of apprehension at Donne's audaciously sexual plea for ravishment by God.

While 'Batter my heart' and 'Show me deare Christ' are the *Holy Sonnets* perhaps best-known for their juxtaposition of the secular, often sexual, and the sacred, they are not alone among the *Divine Poems*. As a group, the germane *Holy Sonnets* are the religious equivalent of the *Songs and Sonets* in their use of earthly metaphors to describe the divine, with several *Holy Sonnets* recalling specific *Songs and Sonets* – for example 'The Anniversarie' – in their imagery. In common with his use of the sacred in the *Songs and Sonets*, too, Donne's use of the secular in the *Divine Poems* varies between individual sonnets, so that sometimes the profane is only implicit, subsumed beneath the explicitly religious tone of a sonnet. However, when his employment of the secular is also sexual in connotation, as in 'Batter my heart' or 'Show me deare Christ', there is critical censure of Donne's perceived impropriety in conflating the obviously profane and the divine. The more sustained is Donne's juxtaposition of the sacred and profane in the *Divine Poems*, for some, the greater the desire to separate them, to dichotomise them. Yet just as the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonets* contain religious imagery in their depictions of earthly love, so Donne draws upon secular metaphor in the *Divine Poems* in expressing his love of God.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Put succinctly, the aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate that for Donne, 'Love is not *agape* or *eros*; it is both' (Patrides xxxvii). In this statement's beguiling simplicity is expressed one of the great profundities of Donne's poetry, and yet Patrides' insight also risks becoming a commonplace; it is only when the wherefore of such a statement is applied to Donne's poetry in some depth that we can comprehend its complex richness. To quote again Donne's definition of love from his *Sermons*, he realises that

Love is so noble, so sovereign an Affection, as that it is due to very few things, and very few things worthy of it. Love is a Possessory Affection, it delivers over him that loves into the possession of that that he loves, it is a transmutatory Affection, it changes him that loves, into the very nature of that that he loves, and he is nothing else. (*Sermons* 1.184)

Consequently, Donne's description of his love, both secular and sacred in object, is comprehensive in its range, for what is set forth in this Sermon, and what Donne reiterates time and again in his *Elegies, Songs and Sonets* and *Divine Poems* is that there is no dichotomy, no distinction, between love's secular manifestation, the love for a man or woman, and love of God. Donne conceives of no dichotomy in the nature of the love being expressed or the images used in its depiction.

In ignoring any distinction between the sacred and the profane, particularly when describing the divine in secular terms, Donne has a weight of orthodox tradition behind him. In Chapter Two that tradition is considered, beginning with the exegetical tradition surrounding The Song of Songs, the means whereby the sensual and erotic are allegorised to fit purely spiritual interpretations of Christ's love for his Bride, (an allegorical representation of either the corporate Church or the individual soul). From Origen onwards, exegetes of The Song of Songs, including Bede, Hugh of

Saint-Victor and St. Bernard of Clairvaux delight in turning its 'literal carnality' (Astell 2) to the service and praise of God, for they see it as perfectly acceptable that the sensual, removed from its earthly context, should be used to worship Christ. The mystics, St. Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross, the Jesuit, Robert Southwell, and the Catholic convert, Richard Crashaw, also draw extensively upon the allegorical tradition of describing the sacred in earthly terms. They tend, however, to be much freer in their use of allegory and secular imagery in their mystical works and poetry, relying less on a close following of the exegetical tradition associated with *The Song of Songs*. St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, and Crashaw particularly, obscure the arbitrary boundaries between the sacred and the secular, while yet remaining orthodox, in ways that discomfited their contemporaries and can still surprise critics today.

As a way of providing some kind of similar secular contextual tradition to that found in *The Song of Songs* I began Chapter Three with a brief description of Petrarchism. Although, as practised by its English exponents, there is little of the spiritual dimension to be found in Petrarchism, with a accompanying scarcity of religious imagery, what use is made of the sacred is significant. At times in the poetry of Wyatt, Surrey, Philip Sidney, and Lady Mary Wroth there is present a sense, shared with Donne, that earthly love can be described, celebrated and sanctified in religious terminology, which exists alongside the conventional depiction of women as superior to and unattainable by lovelorn speakers, and the concomitant use of hyperbole, elegance and stock conceits. I then discussed Donne's *Elegies*, which are the main focus of this chapter and are the first of the two secular groups of poems that I have looked at in this thesis. Small in number, those *Elegies* germane to the discussion, though making some use of sacred imagery, are also full of the wit and frequent cynicism that characterise all the poems in this group. Most often, and strikingly so, Donne uses sacred imagery in deliberate juxtaposition to the overtly secular tone of an individual elegy; in doing so, he heightens the disparity between the

profane reality of an elegy and the sacred imagery used to describe it. More than anywhere else in either his secular or religious poetry, his use of such imagery in the *Elegies* serves to oppose and expose the kind of love being described for what it really is: flippantly witty, mocking, or decidedly derisive and mercurial.

There are aspects of this wit and flippancy in the *Songs and Sonets* – for this is Donne, after all – but in a significant number of the poems the wit does not exclude other, perhaps more serious investigations of love and the concomitant use made of sacred imagery. In Chapter Four I sought to show that while the *Song and Sonets* are connected with the *Elegies*, there are also important differences within the former in the way in which Donne uses sacred imagery to describe his love. In poems like ‘The Exstasie’, ‘The Canonization’ and ‘The Relique’ there is less of a discrepancy between tone and language than in a poem such as ‘The Indifferent’, which has more in common with some of the *Elegies* in both its description and assessment of love. Unlike the *Elegies*, these and other *Songs and Sonets* juxtapose the sacred and secular in a manner that serves to emphasise the validity and worth of the love being described, to raise it to the level of uniqueness, beyond the comprehension of ordinary secular lovers. Interestingly, it is one of the unexplainable ironies, though not confined to Donne, that no matter how intense and sustained the use of the sacred in explaining the secular may be, there is almost no critical demurring at its employment. It is seen as unexceptional for profane lovers to be exalted as saints, worthy of veneration, whose remains may serve as relics for future generations of lovers.

However, as was shown in my discussion of the *Divine Poems*, in Chapter Five, Donne’s bold conflation of the secular and the sacred in these poems causes critical disconcertion, in spite being firmly grounded in the exegetical tradition of The Song of Songs. Despite Donne’s using the concept of anthropomorphism, the giving of human qualities to a deity, as a way of trying to comprehend the essentially unknowable nature of God, there is

something about the overtly secular, sometimes sexual, imagery in the *Holy Sonnets* that surprises and shocks readers. The more obviously sexual is Donne's imagery, the more pronounced the accusations of impropriety and unnecessary eroticism. And yet Donne does not juxtapose the profane and sacred in the *Holy Sonnets* merely for effect. Just as he writes of faithful, often sincere secular love in the *Songs and Sonets* using metaphors of sacred language, so too, in the *Divine Poems* he finds that the only way to come close to expressing his love for God is through secular imagery.

In summary, Donne's practice of ignoring any dichotomy between the sacred and profane in both his secular and religious poetry is a consequence of his belief that in order truly to comprehend what love is, there can be no separation between its human and divine manifestations. When his *Elegies*, *Songs and Sonets*, and *Divine Poems* are discussed together in the interrelated manner that I have pursued in this thesis the scope of Donne's working out of this absence of any distinction between the sacred and profane is readily, and compelling apparent.

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